WITHOUT BLEMISH

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TO-DAY'S PROBLEM

BY

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"HEAVY YOKES," ETC., ETC.

85

"Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side."
LOWELL.—THE PRESENT CRISIS.

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PREFACE.

To suggest measures for the solution of a problem that is taxing the brains of the wise men of the land is to incur the charge of presumption and risk the penalty of arrogance.

To pronounce upon the seeming apathy of the people who were imperatively called upon to solve that problem, while themselves still staggering from the blow that had left them stunned, bewildered, powerless, is to cast one more dart into an already lacerated breast.

To maintain that this problem of the negro's future can be solved alone by the people who know him and to whom he is bound by ties more enduring than the chains of slavery; to maintain that his mental and moral emancipation must be wrought out on the spot where he is destined to make his home for all time to come, is simply to espouse the cause of truth and justice.

As a leaven of suggestion hidden away in many measures of meal this story is offered by the

AUTHOR.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE.
CHAPTER I. A RELIC,	9
CHAPTER II. MRS. STANHOPE INVESTS IN ORPHANS.	23
CHAPTER III. A NEIGHBOR,	40
CHAPTER IV. MRS. G. WARING TROWBRIDGE,	54
CHAPTER V. MR. G. WARING TROWBRIDGE,	64
CHAPTER VI. HARDLINES,	71
CHAPTER VII. OLD DORA,	84
CHAPTER VIII. ROSETTA,	94
CHAPTER IX. A RETURNED WANDERER,	101
CHAPTER X. MISS DENTON RENEWS AN ACQUAINTANCE.	117
CHAPTER XI. THE BLOW DESCENDS,	130
CHAPTER XII. DISCORDANT NOTES,	139
CHAPTER XIII. EUSTIS'S ANALYSIS,	149
CHAPTER XIV. MISS DENTON GIVES A DINNER,	158
CHAPTER XV. SEED BY THE WAYSIDE,	171
CHAPTER XVI. THE PRODIGAL AT HOME,	184
CHAPTER XVII. STORM SHAKEN,	196
CHAPTER XVIII. OLD DORA'S CURSE,	211
CHAPTER XIX. COMFORTED,	224
CHAPTER XX. THE GULF FIXED,	238
CHAPTER XXI. ACCEPTANCE,	250

CHAPTER XXII. OLGA'S BOX, ... 265
CHAPTER XXIII. DR. MADDOX, ... 279
CHAPTER XXIV. AUNT JUDY LITTLE, . . . 290
CHAPTER XXV. STOLEN JOY, ... 301
CHAPTER XXVI. TO-MORROW AND TO-MORROW, . 313
CHAPTER XXVII. CO-WORKERS, ... 332
CHAPTER XXVIII. IN BRIDAL ARRAY, . . . 344
CHAPTER XXIX. THE LETTER DELIVERED, . . 356
CHAPTER XXX. PROVEN BEYOND A DOUBT, . . 367

WITHOUT BLEMISH.

CHAPTER I.

A RELIC.

IN ante-bellum times nature, good-taste and affluence went hand-in-hand in the perfecting of the suburban homes about the quiet little town of Natchez, Mississippi, and amid the subsequent wreck of matter, the upheaval of a system, and the abolition of all that gave their owners social supremacy, they still abide among the things beautiful, with an added touch of pathos that takes on the form of silent guest-chambers, crumbling terraces and weed-choked rose gardens.

With one of the loveliest of these pathetic wrecks we have especially to do, as there, all alone, at the close of the war lived a woman, who, by reason of her stately dignity and almost apathetic repose of manner, fitted admirably well into the somber setting of her home, where, facing west-ward, only the setting sun ever shone upon its faded facade; where the shadows

lay long and black on the checkered marble slab in front of the carriage block; where the singing of the mocking birds in the solemn cedars sounded frivolously impertinent; where the craunching of wheels upon the graveled drive aroused instant attention, and the coming of a visitor was an event; where last year's fallen leaves choked up the rusty tin-gutters that begirt the ornamental coping of the old roof; where thoughts of death and decay came readily and dwelt securely.

Owing to a certain rigid erectness of carriage; a certain very stately poise of the head—suggestive, not remotely, of royalty—together with various involuntary assertions of superiority, this lonely house-holder was known, locally, as "Old Lady Stanhope," although, at the bottom of the few letters she found occasion to write, the name of Margaret J. Stanhope appeared in bold strong characters, that seemed to give emphatic denial to the aptness of the prefix "old."

People judge so superficially, that when, at the close of the four years' struggle which had deprived her of a husband, two sons and a brother, leaving her, for all earthly tie, a boy of fifteen years of age, her hair was found to have whitened, her step grown slow to the degree of heavy listlessness, and the whole woman shrunken from the proportions of a brilliant leader of society, to those of a melancholy repellent recluse, they made haste to say: "Mrs. Stanhope is growing

old fast;" and so prematurely were the honors of old age thrust upon her, that before she had seen her fiftieth birth-day she had come to be spoken of as "the old lady at the Hall" and to be regarded as the legitimate possessor of all the rights and privileges accruing to the oldest inhabitant.

On the other hand, either ignorant of, or utterly indifferent to the pitying comments of her old associates, Mrs. Stanhope passed her days in a species of somnambulism that may have been neither wise nor healthful, but was none the less natural under the circumstances. Apart from the personality and prospects of the boy about whom clung every chord of her heart not unstrung and broken, the future was void and objectless, and the present empty and joyless. But the past! Ah! the past was so real! Her past was her present! It teemed with bitter sweetness! To dwell in it, dream of it, cleave unto it, seemed the only thing possible to do.

Not wishing to envelop the boy who was the last representative of his line, in the gloomy isolation which was the only condition of life endurable to herself in those bereaved days, she had sent him off to college promptly upon the close of the war. Not to the North, for that would have savored too much of acquiescence in a result which had been sealed with the blood of her nearest and dearest. But to Germany, where instruction was thorough and living cheap, she had sent

him in pursuance of advice given her by the only person who ever dared talk to her in an advisory manner, Reverend Walter Bissell, incumbent of the only Episcopal pulpit in the little town.

She had grown strong through the discipline of pain, but a certain hardness had come with the strength. It was without the shedding of a tear, that she had held her boy's bright young face between her hands, while the carriage that was to bear him away from her waited before the door, and said, photographing his features with hungry eyes: "Of course, dear, I shall miss you torturingly at first. I shall miss my boy's ringing laugh; I shall miss the clatter of his horse's feet upon the wooden bridge in the hollow, that told me he was near at home: I shall miss his cap on the rack in the hall—"

"Why not shut up the old house and go along too," Eustis had said, in an off-hand attempt to do away with the shadowy portions of a scheme that filled his own boyish soul with unalloyed satisfaction. But she had silenced him imperiously: "Hush, child, you do not know what you are asking. I could not breathe away from this spot. Moreover, your ability to finish your course over there, depends upon my faithful supervision of your interests here. I will have to manage the plantation with rigid economy to keep the old home-stead for you, and pay your expenses. So don't carry away with you any exaggerated notions of your

own wealth. I don't want to stint you in any necessary expenses however."

Then she had sent him away from her with the understanding that they could not hope to see each other for five years, for her plans for him included one year of travel at the close of four years of study.

It never occurred to Mrs. Stanhope that five years of foreign life and study were perhaps not the best possible training for a young planter, who, in the natural course of events, would be at the head of an estate peopled by a newly emancipated and benighted race; encumbered by debts, incurred by his predecessors under a reckless order of things that was embodied in the necessity, "of buying more land for a surplus of slaves, and buying more slaves for a surplus of land," and demanding practical abilities of more than ordinary degree. All of the Stanhopes had been college-bred men, and until she was financially disabled, Eustis should go through the same educational course that his brothers had.

So she took up the added burden of his absence with a heavy heart, but resolute determination never to let Eustis know what she suffered, there, all alone in the big grand house, over every door of which seemed written in lurid letters, In Memoriam.

The Stanhope place was accounted one of the very handsomest estates in the whole country side. Approached through a park where the live-oak, silvery

cotton-wood and glossy magnolias, furnished forth rich variations in green, the house itself stood in square and massive proportions on the crown of its terraced grounds, each alternate terrace brightly outlined by white or pink azaleas, which, in that congenial soil, grow to the dimensions of small trees.

But when the azaleas bloomed now, the mistress's heart beat yet more heavily, and her step fell yet more slowly, for the boys that had fallen such useless sacrifices to the lost cause, used to fight their mimic wars of York and Lancaster, when the terraces bloomed white and red with the azaleas, and now that the boys were gone, why should the azaleas bloom only to revive the memory of joys she had tasted in those peace-girt days of motherhood?

Down yonder in the hollow, where the clear waters of the creek rippled over its bed of many colored pebbles, stood the bowling alley, under the spreading arms of a giant pecan. A useless sort of a structure now, where the dust lay thick upon the balls in the sloping trough and the pins lay huddled confusedly, just where they had fallen last. Her practical business adviser, a Mr. Trowbridge, Eustis's godfather and legal guardian, advised its leveling and reconstruction into a negro cabin, but though her head might approve, her heart would not consent to such desecration. Some of the pleasantest hours of the happy care-free life she had led in those secure days, before Sumter's rude awaken-

ing, had been spent down at the old alley, lazily swinging in the hammock in the little gallery, with attention evenly divided between the rumbling of the balls over the wooden alley in a hotly contested game between her husband and brother, the book in her hand, and Eustis, wading yonder, bare-foot, in the limpid waters of the creek!

The friendly contestants had fought their last battle, and slept side by side in far off graves! The bowling alley was silenced forever. Eustis had out-grown the boyish delights of bare-foot wading in the creek! Weeds clambered close about the decaying steps and peered insolently through the broken sash of every window! The hammock swung in unsightly tatters from its rusty rings! The old alley was fast dropping into hopeless decay! Only the creek glided by unchanged and uncaring; softly singing the requiem of dead days and buried joys, as it rippled over its bed of many colored pebbles: In Memoriam! In Memoriam!

Within doors it was no better. Not a book! not a chair! not a picture! but spoke to her in mournful tones of the dead past that would not die and never would be past. It would have been better if she would have consented to some innovations, but to her in-turned vision innovation was forgetfulness, and her all of religion was, not to forget.

The desk that had been located by the bay-window

in the library, so that the "judge" should get the full benefit of the honeysuckle-laden air, was too sacred to be tampered with. It was a point of pride with her to keep the contents of that desk precisely as he had left it!

The things he had approved of in life must retain the stamp of that approval now that he was gone. The boys' hunting pouches and guns swung just where they had left them, when they mounted to ride away from her forever, looking so bright and handsome in their new gray uniforms that it was hard yet to realize that they lay side by side in nameless graves: exactly where—she did not even yet know! In those by-gone days one of the brightest spots in the house had been the little studio, in the top of the house, devoted to the æsthetic slovenliness of her artist brother, whose last unfinished water sketch still stood upon the easel, surrounded by all the belongings of the artist, undisturbed and sacred!

Small wonder, that the relic of all this home brightness walked now as one whose burden was almost too heavy to be borne. And thus she had lived ever since the dread certainty that none of them would ever come back to her. Like a cave-dweller she persistently turned from the sunshine and groped in the darkness. Physically, she was well enough looked after by two of her old slaves, whose tender hearts made the leaving of the lonely woman an impossibility. The only modern

thing about this grand old home was a very small and very shabby young colored girl, who, when she opened the front door to the rare visitors that found their way to the house behind the azaleas, had an incurable trick of regarding them suspiciously with a pair of excessively wide open eyes, then with picturesque tatters flapping wildly about her small bare black feet she would speed through the grand hall shrilly announcing "white folks," to whomsoever it might concern, in tones of mingled terror and surprise. But then Dumps was simply an anachronism done in ebony.

One day Mrs. Stanhope's man of business had occasion to submit for her examination a very important legal document. She read the paper in silence, and folding it up with that mechanical precision that was part of every thing she did, she handed it back to him with only one, and that a totally irrelevant comment. She quoted from the document:

"Margaret, relict of John E. Stanhope! How queer to think of one's self as nothing but a relic."

(The day chanced to be one of Mrs. Stanhope's anniversaries: she had been telling her beads on the rosary of her woes.)

"But the import of the paper, Mrs. Stanhope?"

"Oh! that is all right I suppose," she said in tones of utter indifference.

Then the lawyer had gone away and told the doctor that "if something was not done for old lady Stanhope

she would fall into settled melancholia. Her mind was already losing its grasp of the realities of life, as evidenced by her torpid indifference to a transaction involving several thousand dollars." And the doctor after paying her an unsolicited visit and getting politely snubbed for his pains, told the minister that, "if something was not done for old lady Stanhope, Eustis Stanhope would return from college only to put his mother into an insane asylum." So the Rev. Dr. Bissell threw himself into the breach and daringly told Mrs. Stanhope that 'she was doing her son Eustis a great and irreparable injury."

"What can you possibly mean?" asked the woman of many sorrows, fixing a startled look on the minister's uncompromising face.

"I mean that you are rendering yourself such a very undesirable sort of companion for a boy with any life or wit in him, that he must needs come home supernaturally gifted in point of filial reverence, or be the veriest muff in existence, not to fly from your depressing presence to any relief that offers."

Mrs. Stanhope hurled reproaches at her accuser until her quiver was empty, then, with sudden apologetic meekness, asked :—

"What would you have me do, doctor?"

"Do! why you must arouse yourself! You must shake off this lethargy! You've very little more animation in you than the woman in the mourning

brooches where the woman and the tomb-stone and the weeping willow are all manufactured out of the same material."

The Reverend Walter Bissell never did things by halves. When he scolded, he scolded; when he petted, he petted, and he never left one in doubt as to which he was doing, either. He was scolding now vigorously.

Mrs. Stanhope passed her long thin hand dreamily across her forehead, as she asked, yet more meekly:—

"How?"

"How! Why, you must get out of this. You must make a change. You've refused yourself to your neighbors until they've all dropped you! You must travel, if to no other end than to discover that the boundary fence of Stanhope Hall is not the boundary line of the universe, nor, when the sun sinks behind that big old oak by your window, is the entire world left in darkness. Why, you're in a worse plight than Robinson Crusoe. He couldn't get away from himself, and you won't."

"Where must I go?" she asked, groping toward the light, too much alarmed at the idea of doing Eustis any wrong to retain the slightest personal preference for a destination, or even to feel any indignation at this unsolicited interest in her affairs.

"Go! Why, anywhere! everywhere!" says the doctor of souls, with liberal vagueness.

"I can't go everywhere, doctor!" his victim sighed reproachfully.

"Well, then, go North!"

"North!"

The suggestion was as if some one should suddenly fling wide open to the blazing sunlight the windows of a room long closed and given over to shadowy darkness and creeping things. The garish sunlight blinded and dazzled her! The suggestion stunned her! Go to the North, where every thing was bright and fresh and crisp and sparkling with energy and prosperity! Drag her wounds and her sores to the gate of Dives! Risk the pitying solicitude of the well-meaning, and the cold endurance of the unforgiving! Place her loss in stinging juxtaposition with their gain! Why, it would be like passing from a grave to a carousal! It was a remedy she shrank from applying, even though "for Eustis's sake," was beginning to peal through her brain in a monotonous chime-like fashion! Could she extend the hand of amity to these Northern conquerors without treason to her dear martyrs?

"North, doctor?" She repeated the words with a whole volume of reproach in her voice.

"Yes! Why not? You have friends there. All the judge's relatives live there. I think your husband was a Cleveland man originally?"

There was a brisk breeziness about the doctor's arguments that seemed to follow the sunlight into that

darkened chamber of Mrs. Stanhope's soul with winnowing effect.

"Yes," she acknowledged hesitantly, "but—"

The minister divined her hidden thought.

"Mrs. Stanhope," he said with grave assertion, "the war is over! Every body but a few sore-heads and unreasonable women surrendered when Robert E. Lee laid down his sword."

Thus driven from her last stronghold, Mrs. Stanhope consented to "think about it."

And so, about two weeks later, the astonishing piece of news, that old Mrs. Stanhope had actually left home, percolated through the neighborhood.

As it was not the season of the year when she, as nominal head of the plantation over in the Louisiana bottoms, from which she derived her revenues, would be going to New Orleans for an annual settlement with her commission merchants, this sudden hegira, involving, as it did, the reappearance of the great Saratoga trunks that used to make regular summer trips from the Hall to some fashionable watering place, and the promotion of Aunt Betty from the poultry-yard to the dignity of an extempore lady's maid, must mean something! Must mean a great deal, in fact.

To conceive of old lady Stanhope as alive, but permanently located anywhere but in the house where the azaleas bloomed, and the dropping pecans marked the coming of the fall, required too great a stretch of the

imagination to be indulged in by the most frivolous-minded of the neighbors, who had long since been excluded from the confidence of the lonely woman. That she would come back to them in the flesh, no one doubted. But that she had gone away at all, every one marveled.

When, with a plaintive moan, Mrs. Stanhope heard the great wooden gate of the park swing creaking back on its hinges, shutting her out from her seclusion, she scored one more sacrifice for Eustis's sake.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. STANHOPE INVESTS IN ORPHANS.

IF one can imagine the sensations a snail would experience upon being suddenly dispossessed of its shell, and placed, exposed and writhing, in the middle of a modern model bee-hive, with the imperative necessity staring it in the face for adapting its ways to those of the swarming inmates of that hive, one can imagine how Mrs. Stanhope felt when she found herself actually domesticated, for the time being, in the city home of her prosperous Northern connections.

For awhile, the desire to crawl, snail-wise, into some obscure corner of the hive, was her only well defined sensation. It hurt her, all this activity and stir and bustle and industry, and, however satisfactory the outcome might be in a rich store of wax and honey, she believed she preferred her own sleepy existence. But as the bees in that particular cell of the great national hive were imbued with the tenderest pity for this sore stricken snail, she was not permitted to indulge in her favorite pastime of brooding over the inevitable, even to the point of calling divine justice into question. Fortunately for her, her sojourn was made among a

masterful lot, who, believing that their own brisk, breezy ways, were the best sort of ways, combated her gloom and reticence at every turn with forceful determination. She had come prepared to find herself the object of much solicitude and volumes of good advice, which she had made up her mind beforehand to accept as part of the regimen necessary to insure her against the threatened calamity of proving a "nuisance to Eustis."

When she had quite made up her mind that Rev. Dr. Bissell was altogether in the right and herself altogether in the wrong, she had selected this cousin of the judge's as the one among all his relatives with whom it would be least hard for her to come in contact under her much altered circumstances. She remembered this cousin as a soft-eyed, soft-voiced Christian lady, who went about doing good for the love of God and her fellow-man, and, with whom it was quite possible to differ fundamentally without feeling one's temper rise irrepressibly.

She could hardly have selected a place where she could have been lifted more completely and suddenly out of the old groove than in this home of the judge's cousin.

"Cousin," she said, toward the close of the second week of her visit, "I envy you Northern women the fullness of your lives. You never seem to have a superfluous moment! Never an unappropriated second!

Do you ever misspend an hour? I can hardly imagine you taking time to grieve for the taking off of your nearest and dearest!"

"Perhaps it is best so!" Mrs. Dana answered, with the slow distinctness of a person habituated to weighing her thoughts before committing them to the medium of irrecoverable words. "Perhaps it is best so. I doubt if it is ever well to waste time in brooding over the incurable. I think the fuller one's life is of the proper sort of activities, the happier, don't you?"

"Undoubtedly it is better to wear out than to rust out. But, if there is nothing to fill one's life with, what then?"

"I can not conceive of such a condition of affairs."

[The judge's cousin was the queen bee of the hive. A combination of gentleness, shrewdness, meekness and activity. The possessor of a soft, quiet voice, a pair of mild blue eyes, wavy white hair, upon which the weight of many a well spent year pressed lightly. Her voice was full of mild astonishment at the idea of any human being complaining of having nothing to fill the hours with.]

"Nevertheless, it exists in my own case," said Mrs. Stanhope, with somewhat haughty assertion. "The sparse population of the neighborhood of Stanhope Hall, even inclusive of the town, renders the taking care of our few paupers and orphans a task easily performed by a certain class of persons who are always

only too glad to take such duties on themselves. Of course I subscribe, but there's nothing else for me to do in that direction. My neighbors are all persons in my own sphere of life. Planters' families, more or less broken up by the war, poor, by contrast with their former circumstances, but of course not objects of charity, nor even of friendly interference."

"Who *is* thy neighbor?" Mrs. Dana asked with sweet solemnity.

The two women were sitting alone at the luncheon table. The other members of the family were always too busy to join in this informal meal. Mrs. Dana carefully sweetened a second cup of tea and extended it to her guest, unconscious that she had let fall a drop of gall into her cousin's cup.

Mrs. Stanhope flushed a little before answering. She had come prepared to take issue on various points, and had felt thankful that, heretofore, none of a very alarming complexion had cropped out above the level of well-conducted social intercourse.

"In a social sense," she answered a trifle nervously, "no one who would furnish scope for the most intrusive philanthropy. In a Christian sense, I suppose it would take in every body of a high or low degree, darkeys included."

"I should think you would find a practically inexhaustible field *there*." Mrs. Dana's emphasis was significant.

"With my negroes?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Dana's hobby was national education. She was preparing now to mount and ride decorously.

Mrs. Stanhope had received a violent shock, and her face showed the traces of the conflict within.

The sound of wheels circling the house was a welcome diversion to both. Mrs. Dana suddenly dismounted from her pet hobby (mentally resolved to remount it at an early date in the future) and retreated to safe neutral ground.

"I ordered the carriage for half past two, Margaret," she said. "This is the annual reception at our Protestant Orphan Asylum. I rather think you will enjoy an hour or so there. The building alone is well worth your inspection. We are rather proud of our children too."

The invitation was given and accepted with marked alacrity. Both felt that they had stepped backward from the brink of an abyss not one second too promptly. Mrs. Dana was regarded as a sort of patron saint at the asylum in whose behalf she spent much of her time, a great deal of her money, and an inexhaustible stock of the liveliest interest.

An hour of exhaustive and exhausting examination of the various wards and departments inclined Mrs. Stanhope very favorably to her cousin's proposition that they should take seats in the little school-room

and watch the kindergarten exercises in the school. The sight of that small army of well cared for little waifs, so ignorant of and so indifferent to the superior blessedness of individual homes, had something very pathetic in it. Something that touched a long silent chord in Mrs. Stanhope's heart and made it vibrant. Something that lifted her out of her selfish absorption and impelled her to say with an air of sudden but fixed resolve :

"Amelia! I tell you what I can do. I can take one of your orphans home and forward her interests in life. That will give me some one to care for while Eustis is away. I will be good to her." This last in answer to a grave uncertainty in Mrs. Dana's eyes.

"We are always willing to put our little ones into good hands. The expense of taking care of so large a number is by no means light. I know you would be good to the child ; I am only afraid, too good."

"In what way?"

"You would forget the future in indulgence of the present."

"Try me," said Mrs. Stanhope coaxingly. "My heart is quite set on retrieving my character for uselessness."

"Has your fancy fastened upon any particular child?"

"Yes. There is one here I have been watching ever since I came in. She is a round-faced, black-eyed

little sprite, that has looked at me with a bright smile every time she came a little closer in the exercises. There she is now! She is holding a child by the hand, who has on a dark red dress, and is herself so very dark, that if I had seen her first down home I should have called her a mulatto."

"Perhaps she is," said Mrs. Dana, in a matter-of-fact voice. "We have several children of mixed blood in the asylum."

"Amelia!"

Mrs. Stanhope had received another shock. But as she had not come North to be reconstructed, neither had she come hither to reconstruct, so she wisely refrained from comment, and gave her whole attention to the selection of her orphan. She was delighted and surprised at the amount of enthusiasm she felt stirring within her.

Two by two! hand in hand, the little army of waifs walked slowly past her chair, casting each a solemnly shy glance upward at the handsome lady who sat there, with her gloved hands folded quietly over a little satchel, while her large melancholy brown eyes searched each small face for outward and visible signs of that inward and spiritual grace which she should prefer to find in the child whom she proposed taking into her empty heart and lonely home. Mrs. Stanhope quite prided herself on her talents as a physiognomist, and was confident of her ability to detect good blood.

"Stop!"

She said it suddenly, and laid a detaining hand on the shoulder of a child who was just passing by. Two children came to a prompt halt in obedience to her demand. The one on whom she had fixed her gaze clutched the hand of her companion convulsively, while she raised a pair of soft dark eyes timidly to the lady's face.

"Amelia! I want this one."

Mrs. Stanhope took the small hand that was nervously twisting the smooth surface of a little apron into untidy puckers, drew the child toward her, and smoothed the wavy black hair back from the rounded temples with a sort of proprietary interest.

Mrs. Dana smiled a little queerly, then said in a low voice: "The other is decidedly the prettier, and I believe would be the least troublesome. Olga is a good girl."

"Which is Olga?"

"The larger and darker one."

Mrs. Stanhope glanced from the pretty round face that had so struck her fancy to Olga.

She stood there like a little statue. She was a head taller than Mrs. Stanhope's orphan (as she already began to call the younger child), and looked much older. Her attitude toward the younger child seemed altogether protective. Her dark rich complexion was brought into picturesque relief by the bright red of the

woolen dress she wore. Her face was a perfect oval, unchildlike in its contour, and with a settled gravity about it that seemed to belong as much to the large liquid brown eyes as to the small mouth that was tight-shut, as if in habitual suppression of outcry. Her intensely black hair was very glossy, and waved crisply up to the very roots. Mrs. Stanhope's prolonged scrutiny brought the rich blood in a hot tide into the child's smooth dark cheeks.

"Olga, you and Gipsy sit down there a little while."

Mrs. Dana pointed to a bench which would place the children quite out of hearing of the discussion which was to decide the fate of one or both of them.

It was no unusual thing for these children, who belonged to nobody in particular, to be given away; and with that love of change and excitement so natural to their years, such transfers were regarded as among the most delightful possibilities of their lives. So, while Olga sat with her hands folded restfully on her white aproned lap, scanning the strange lady's face with grave interest, her companion chewed her apron strings nervously, perpetually crossing and re-crossing the restless little feet that swung mid-way between the floor and the high backless bench.

"Ain't that a purty dress, Ollie?" she whispered venturesomely into Olga's ear, after a prolonged inspection of Mrs. Stanhope's rustling silk.

"She's so beautiful herself!" (Olga's most cheerful

utterances had a plaintive ring.) "I wish she wanted me. Gipsy, will you miss me when she takes you home with her?"

For all answer, Gipsy threw her arms impulsively about her companion's neck, whispering with vicious emphasis: "If she don't want you, she needn't to want me. I'd scratch her eyes 'fore I'd go without you."

"You ridiculous girl," said Olga, disentangling herself from the clinging arms with a laugh, "there, Gipsy, do behave yourself! See! Mrs. Dana is looking at us with such sober eyes. I'm afraid she thinks us bad or silly or something."

At that moment Mrs. Dana was saying of Olga:

"We think her very pretty and she is one of the best and brightest children we have."

Mrs. Stanhope answered in the combative tone of one who wishes to enforce a previously expressed view:

"She is unquestionably of mixed blood. She is what we would call in the South a quadroon. That is the child of a white father and mulatto woman. They are proverbially handsome. This child is a perfect specimen of that unfortunate race. Such a pity too! But the other one! My orphan! I've quite made up my mind that such a bright-eyed, round-cheeked, dimpled thing would be good for me to have. She is an exquisite brunette. Lively too, I doubt not, when she is at ease with one."

"She is a perfect gipsy in her temperament and pro-

clivities. One of the most troublesome children in the house. She has outbursts of passion in which no one but Olga can do any thing with her. I am afraid your choice is an unfortunate one."

"I can't see why! she is decidedly the prettiest one you have. I do not expect to rear her with any great expectations, but I will do a good part by her."

"I do not doubt that."

"There is nothing about her to shock one's sensibilities," Mrs. Stanhope resumed with growing enthusiasm. "She will not be a perpetual reminder of the asylum. She don't look a bit forlorn. She will be a desirable companion for me always, and as I grow older I shall need her more. There is always the possibility, you know, of Eustis's marrying and leaving me entirely alone."

"You will find her petulant and unreasonable," says Mrs. Dana, giving the obverse of the picture. "It is because of her many punishments and scrapes that Olga seems to have assumed the position of mentor, drawn toward her by her own affectionate disposition. The matron says that Olga can do more with her than any one else. In fact, it was Olga who found the poor little waif crying just inside the gate one morning, when the children were turned out to play between breakfast and school, and brought her into the house."

"I would like to know all you can tell me about her."

"That is literally all that we know, beyond the fact that pinned under her apron was a note which begged the matron to take care of the little girl for an unfortunate mother who wished to secure the child against the brutality of a step-father, who lost no opportunity to show his hatred of her."

"Was the letter that of an educated woman?"

"Quite so."

"Then there is the probability of the child being reclaimed?"

"We do not think so."

"Why?"

"Because we simply regard the note as one of the many excuses some women make who desire to rid themselves of incumbrances."

"How old was she when left here?"

"She could just walk and could only say a few words."

"And nothing more has ever been heard of the mother?"

"Nothing at all. I suppose from the fact that she led her into the asylum Olga has always felt a proprietary interest in her."

"How did the child Olga come?" Mrs. Stanhope asked, stirred into transient interest by the frequent mention of the child's name.

"She was brought here by a light colored woman who said she was the child's nurse; that its mother had

just died, and that its father had been dead some years; that she was not able to support the child, so brought her to the asylum, in accordance with the dying instructions of the child's mother. She also left with the matron a box, a small black wooden box, tied up with strong strings, which she said the child's mother requested should be given to her when she came of age and not before under any consideration whatever."

"Just as I suspected! That light colored woman was the child's mother. She wished to give her daughter the benefits of this home and fabricated the story about being her nurse."

"Do you think that possible?"

"If you knew the race as well as I do, you would know that any amount of duplicity is possible. But call the children, please. I should like to talk with the one you call Gipsy."

"We call her Gipsy because the name seems to suit her so well, but when she first came here, she was always crying and saying, 'Tennie wants mamma;' we supposed she was trying to say Fannie or Jennie." She had beckoned the children nearer while speaking.

Mrs. Stanhope compelled an upward glance from Gipsy's frightened eyes with her hand under the small quivering chin.

"Little girl," she said. "I live all alone, when I am at home, in a big house where there are many pretty things, but no little children to skip and dance and

laugh. I want a little child to live with me. I will dress her nicely and she shall have opportunities to learn to read and write, and I will give her a good home. Then, when she grows up and I grow old, I will expect her to be good to me and read to me and keep me from being a very dismal old lady. I think we could make each other very happy. Do you want to go with me?"

"And Ollie!"

Gipsy was utterly unable to entertain any plan of happiness from which Olga was excluded.

A cloud of disatisfaction swept across Mrs. Stanhope's face. Mrs. Dana caught the reflection of it and hastened to say:

"Indeed you had better make another selection, Margaret. Gipsy will simply be a burden to you separated from Olga. You have no idea what those two children are to each other. We aim to foster affectionate tendencies in all our children. But it is mutual devotion in this case."

"Why can't Ollie go too?" Gipsy asks pleadingly. "She says her house is big, and Ollie's so little she wouldn't take up much room." Her eyes were turned upon Mrs. Dana.

Olga stood motionless and mute. Her small hands hung in front of her folded over each other, as it was her serene custom to carry them when idle. The red lips were shut in firm repression of any wish on the

subject, but in her eyes the light of eager desire burned brightly.

As Mrs. Stanhope noted the pathetic patience united with evident eagerness that pervaded the little form and face, a throb of pity pulsed in her heart, for which she silently apologized to all her ancestors. The child was so unmistakably of mixed blood, you know. That tightly waving hair, that rich blood tint! She could not be deceived. That nurse's story did not impose upon her at all!

"Tell her you want to go too, Ollie," said Gipsy, petulantly turning upon the pretty mute. "You know you said you did."

"Did you say so, Olga?" Mrs. Dana asked.

"Yes, ma'am, I would love to go. I would try not to be in the way, nor be any bother." The little mouth quivered over the words.

Mrs. Stanhope was conquered.

"It will do no harm," she said, in a careless aside to her cousin. "I do not propose to adopt any orphan into the position of a daughter! She may be very useful to Gipsy and to me."

But Mrs. Dana answered seriously: "These children know no difference here, cousin, and I should not be doing my duty to Olga if I placed her where she would be compelled to feel herself an inferior. If you are willing to take both these children with you, bound by the conditions we exact of every one who takes

them from the shelter of this asylum, I would be glad to consign these two to you, for I know you would be good to them, and I think the charge of them would be good for you."

"What are your conditions?"

"Whosoever takes an orphan from us, binds him or herself to keep her until her eighteenth year, giving her such educational and religious advantages as may be in their power. When the orphan shall have reached her eighteenth year, if she declines to remain longer with her patron, she shall be at liberty to select her own mode of life, provided she selects the right sort of vocation. Her patroness shall, under no consideration, let her go away from her entirely destitute, thus rendering her an easier prey to temptation, but shall give her fifty dollars on the day of separation."

"I see nothing very alarming in all that. I can promise that as safely for Olga as for Gipsy. By the way, I shall have to invent some better name than that. It sounds too much like a pet-horse's name."

"But in Olga's case you must make me an individual promise."

"And that is?"

"That you will never let her or any one else know of your suspicion concerning the taint in her blood. Here, we make no doubt as to the truth of the woman's statement who brought her here."

"It would be a superfluous piece of unkindness to

do any thing of the sort. She will not come near enough to me socially to render the erection of barriers essential. Any thing else ?"

"Nothing but your promise, as a woman of honor, on that one point."

"Consider it given," said Mrs. Stanhope, a trifle haughtily, rising and walking toward the bench where the children had again retreated to await her decision.

Mrs. Dana knew of yore that Mrs. Stanhope's lightest promise was held of sacred import, so she was quite content to give the two children into her keeping when a week later she turned her face homeward.

"I shall do my duty by both children according to my best judgment," was her parting promise. "More I can not say."

"Nor I ask."

And so, when the gates of the outer park once more opened to admit the mistress of Stanhope Hall, two little waifs were added to her luggage: a supply of fresh vitality coursed through her veins, and many novelties in the shape of new notions and progressive ideas were among her mental possessions.

CHAPTER III.

A NEIGHBOR.

"OLLIE, do you like it here?"

"It is just like heaven! Of course I like it."

"Heaven must be awful lonesome then, that's all I've got to say."

For a moment previous to this sudden colloquial outburst the only audible sounds in the big library at Stanhope Hall had been the meaningless pecking of a slate pencil on a slate, as Virginia substituted the ancient game of "tit-tat-to," for the sums in addition she had been set to do.

(Mrs. Stanhope had promptly re-christened the child, and now, for the three months she had been an inmate of the Hall, she had never heard the old familiar "Gipsy," unless Olga inadvertently made use of it.)

"It is lonesome here," Olga admitted, "but I would love to think I was to live here always."

"Well, aren't we to?" Virginia asked with eyebrows arched with surprise at this first hint of any lack of permanency in the present arrangement. She had been unconsciously an ingrate, accepting the pretty dresses, the petting, the educational advantages sud-

denly bestowed upon her, with the unquestioning serenity of a child who had always been taken care of by some one, and took it for granted she always would be. The possibility that all the pleasantness she had just been inveighing against as dullness should suddenly cease, was startling in the extreme.

"You are perhaps, but I am not."

"What are you going to do?"

"When I am eighteen I am going to make my own living some sort of way," says Olga wistfully.

"But 'the madam' won't let you."

Their difficulty in addressing Mrs. Stanhope had never been smoothed away.. With the caressing instincts of childhood they would gladly have bestowed some title of kinship upon her. Virginia, more frequently than not ventured to call her "Auntie Stanhope." Olga cautiously watched the effect of such temerity, and was not emboldened to follow it up. "The madam" was a phrase borrowed from the servants, who, discarding the old form "Mistiss," were thrown upon their very limited resources for a substitute.

"I don't think the madam will care much, Virginia, where I am concerned. Indeed she often says to me, 'when you leave me,' or, 'should you ever have no one but yourself to depend on,' or something of that sort, when she is advising me to learn to sew nicely, and cut and fit."

This was said without any bitterness. Indeed there was none in the child's heart. Possessed of acute powers of perception, she had very soon recognized the fact that she and Virginia stood in different attitudes toward their common benefactor. In her own childish fashion she had reasoned it all out, and accepted the result placidly:—"She only took me because Gipsy would not come without me, and when she gets older and cares more for other things and people than she does for me, I will be in the way. Gipsy is so pretty, she will always be welcome. People must love Gipsy."

"What you reckon you'll do?" said Virginia, able to discuss Olga's future with cold-blooded serenity, since her own was not involved in it.

"I don't know. It's a long ways off yet. I'm only a child; maybe I'll die before then."

Virginia sniffed this idea to scorn, and turned adviser: "If I was you, I'd rather be a dressmaker than a teacher. If you're a dressmaker yourself, your clothes will always fit you. If you're a teacher, you'll be bothered out of your life by bad children. I don't like bad children."

From her earliest childhood Olga's habit had been one of extreme reticence. Perhaps, if the child whom she had led crying into the presence of the matron of the asylum had been nearer her own age, this reserve might have melted away in the daily companionship of

their subsequent life, but, as it was, her attitude toward Virginia had always been protective and encouraging. She gave much more than she might ever hope to receive from the little brown-eyed Gipsy, who now, baffled of her desire to help settle Olga's future vocation, finally and decisively turned toward the window, in search of a new sensation, with the airy inconsequence of a butterfly.

"Olga!" she called presently, in an excited voice, "I see the top of a buggy coming up the hill."

"Only the top?" Olga asked from the other side of the room, where she was conscientiously scratching her way down the page of a rather careless looking copy-book.

"It's a dusty buggy, and the top's all crooked and humped up. Now I see the horse! It's a funny specky looking white horse, and when he bobs his head up and down, one ear flips back and the other ear flops forward. Oh! how hard he has to pull. Now he's at the top of the hill, don't you hear the wheels on the gravel? There's just one little old lady in the buggy, she's driving herself. She's got a veil all over her hat, but she don't look like she had any neck. Now she's stopped at the carriage block! She's twisting the reins about the whip with black cotton gloves on! Oh! Ollie, she's getting out! She's coming in! She's white, too! Oh! do come see this funny looking little old woman."

Olga's curiosity was not proof against the announcement that a stranger was actually within their gates, so she hastened to join Gipsy at the window, and fully partook of her curiosity. Since Mrs. Stanhope had found her orphans such a pleasurable resource, she had grown more than ever indifferent to the neighbors, whose roof-trees were visible from various hills and groves about Stanhope, but whose existence she was willing to take for granted. In this way the Rev. Dr. Bissell was about the only white acquaintance the children had made since coming South.

Sure enough! there, walking toward the house with the slow, ungraceful gait of a hunch-back, holding her black silk skirt in jealous guard against contaminating contact, her veil thrown back from a face wan and pinched in hue and outline, a pair of keen gray eyes roving restlessly over the lawn as she advanced, was, what appeared to the children a most wonderful looking object.

The little old lady was evidently quite familiar with the premises, for passing through the front door that always stood open in warm weather, she tapped lightly on the library door, and then entered without ceremony.

Virginia shrank in unfeigned terror from the grotesque figure that halted on the threshold repaying-curiosity with curiosity.

"Why, what on earth? Where did Mrs. Stanhope

pick you two midgets up, and where is she anyhow, my dears?"

The extreme sweetness of the voice that asked these questions, and the kindly look of interest that came into the little old lady's large tender gray eyes as they rested on the two childish faces full of awe, quite dissipated Olga's half-formed suspicion that this might be a veritable Brownie, whose home was in some one of the many vine-tangled bayous by which the Hall was surrounded.

"We are Mrs. Stanhope's orphans, ma'am, and Mrs. Stanhope will be in presently, she went to show Uncle Jake where to plant some trees."

"Mrs. Stanhope's orphans, hey! well, if she 'd had as much to do with orphans as I have, she would have been shy enough of importing any."

The little lady selected an arm-chair with the air of a person who was familiar with the good and bad qualities of each chair in the room, and having pulled off her black cotton gloves, she began unwinding the long brown gauze veil that enveloped half her head and shoulders. Her arms were short and their movements awkward. With that instinct toward helpfulness that was either hers by birthright, or had been instilled into her at some very early period of her life, Olga came quietly forward and unwound the veil with which the visitor was wrestling.

"Thank you, dear! That was kindly thought of."

The little old lady smoothed down the light thin hair on both sides of a forehead where the blue vein tracery showed plainly through the delicate white of her temples. Her large eyes followed Olga approvingly, as she folded the long veil and laid hat, gloves, and veil on a stand against the wall.

"And now, dear, if you will run and tell Mrs. Stanhope that Miss Denton is here, that she has come to spend the day and would be very much obliged to her if she would have her horse put up, I will be very much obliged to you."

"Do you keep orphan 'sylum?" Virginia asked with sudden directness, as Olga's disappearance left her alone with the visitor.

Miss Denton was struggling with a huge ball of red worsted that had gone into her pocket under protest, and now seemed equally reluctant to leave its friendly shelter. She brought it out with a vigorous jerk, as she turned her astonished eyes on the child.

"You said," Virginia continued, answering this look, "that if Mrs. Stanhope had as much to do with orphans as you did, she wouldn't 'a' wanted any more!"

"So I did, so I did. And I ought to have been ashamed of myself. Orphans are very nice and sweet, and I love them all, my orphan more than all the rest of the world put together. My orphan is a great big fellow, bigger than I am now."

"Then he ain't any orphan at all," said Virginia, who

evidently considered herself an authority on the subject, and regarded the condition of orphanage as subject to statutes of limitation.

She watched Miss Denton's preparations for getting to work mutely for a second, then said, coaxingly:

"Tell me some more about your big orphan."

"Oh! if you've come here to live you'll know him some time or other."

"Has he got any fun in him?"

"Lots."

"That's the sort I like best. I like funny people."

Miss Denton laughed and fell to knitting with two big ivory needles that clicked like castanets as she rapidly diminished the size of the red woolen ball, indulging Virginia's curious questioning the while. She evidently felt very much at home. Mrs. Stanhope came in presently and greeted her visitor with unusual cordiality for her. It would be impossible to imagine a greater contrast than these two women presented. The one tall, stately and straight as a poplar, with a restful composure of manner that never deserted her; the other short, ill-framed and crooked, with a nervous under-tow of excitement about her that found perpetual expression through some portion of her anatomy, and demanded a conductor in the shape of the big ivory needles that consumed ball after ball of zephyr wool with no ulterior object beyond that of giving constant occupation to a pair of long blue-veined hands.

The one, the sole proprietor of one of the finest estates in the country; the other, a paid attendant upon the caprices of a valetudinarian. The one, imbued with all the conservatism of caste, hedged about with pride and prejudices that retained vitality simply for lack of opposing influences; the other, radically progressive in all her views, and fearless to an extreme in giving expression to them. Yet, the two women had come nearer together than a categorical description of their opposing characteristics would seem to make possible. Mrs. Stanhope pitied and admired the lonely little spinster; Miss Denton pitied and loved the stately widow of Stanhope Hall.

"And so," said the visitor, after the first greetings were over, "you have invested in orphans."

"Yes," Mrs. Stanhope glanced through the window, where the two children were availing themselves of this unexpected holiday, by clambering in and out of Miss Denton's horseless buggy, "and I sometimes wonder if I have not made a mistake."

"Troublesome?"

"Not in the least. On the contrary, so far, I have found them a greater source of pleasure than I had dared hope. But the responsibility is grave."

"One of them will never give you any trouble.

"Which one is that?"

"The little Italian-looking brunette. She will always be docile, and adapt herself to circumstances."

"I wish I could think so, but you don't know Olga. And she may have to adapt herself to circumstances of a most extraordinary character.

"But," she continued, warning herself off dangerous ground, "it was about those children I sent for you to-day. I want you to undertake their education. I find myself lacking in the patience requisite. I am afraid I should get quite to disliking the poor little things if I had to contend with them every day."

"Or they, you," said Miss Denton, placidly.

"I suppose you have the time?"

"Ample. My young tyrant is off at college, and my old one has taken a fancy to try the virtues of some German Spa. I am not only my own mistress, for the first time in my life, but have the whole place to myself."

Their business concerning the teaching of the children satisfactorily disposed of, Mrs. Stanhope asked, with languid interest:

"Tell me what has been going on in the neighborhood. I have been away quite an age for me."

"Yes, three months would be quite an age for any one of us moles. But, you know, nothing ever happens here, unless a mule dies, or somebody's best cow is stolen, or something of an equally startling nature."

"In the main, perhaps, you are right; but one thing has happened since I went away. Jake tells me that Wildermere is sold."

"So it is. I took it for granted you knew that. Did Jake tell you what it was sold for?"

"No; he just said it was sold, and that it was being beautifully fixed up."

"For a colored seminary," said Miss Denton, with a scrutinizing look at her hostess.

Mrs. Stanhope's brow clouded, her lips came together ominously. Wildermere had once been the home of elegance and refinement. Its proprietors had been among her dearest friends. Death and removals had long since relegated the beautiful home to emptiness and silence. But, hitherto, it had been monumental in its desolation.

"What are the Bradshaws thinking about?" she asked, angrily.

"About putting a perfectly useless piece of property into the form of dollars and cents, I suppose," says Miss Denton, uncurling a fresh supply of red worsted, as she knitted placidly on. "I know there's only one of the boys and the mother left now, and they live over on the plantation, altogether. So, where's the sense of keeping Wildermere in the family. They are too poor to keep up a town house, and run the plantation, too."

"Yes—but—"

"Yes—but," says Miss Denton, laughing into the clouded face of her friend, "if Wildermere had been sold to any other parties, or for any other pur-

pose than for a seminary for our own darkeys, you would have thought that the Bradshaws had done a very wise thing."

"Perhaps you are right, but then—"

"Of course I am right. I judge of you by my own sensations, when the news first reached me. I suppose generation after generation of us must pass away before the balances can be nicely adjusted to the weighing of just such questions as this. As far as I am individually concerned, without taking any very high moral grounds, I am willing to see this educational experiment faithfully tried, without let or hindrance. We contend for its folly; its advocates for its wisdom. Nothing short of demonstration will ever satisfy either side as to the issue. I suppose our views are pretty much the outcome of local influences. At any rate, it is the part of wisdom to bear this dispensation philosophically."

"Especially," says Mrs. Stanhope with a bitter curl of the lip, "as our feelings in the matter are not likely to be taken into consideration."

"Not at all likely. Indeed, a few years hence, when we've had time to accustom ourselves to the sight of the Wildermere lawns and rooms and terraces swarming with dusky aspirants for academic honors, doubtless we'll begin to associate it in our thoughts with the classic groves of Athens, you know."

"How can you make a jest of any thing so horrible?"

Mrs. Stanhope asked indignantly, so indignantly that Miss Denton laughed long and merrily.

"My dear," she said finally, sobering down and wiping her eyes, "don't be so tragic. There may be a ludicrous side to it, but there certainly is not a horrible one. I know it is a trial to you. Perhaps even more of one to you than to me. But there is one consolation. The people who are at the head of it are really genteel."

"I fail to see any consolation in that," said Mrs. Stanhope, with such marked emphasis that little Miss Denton, considering discretion the better part of valor, diplomatically steered into smoother waters.

The day was drawing well on to a close when Mrs. Stanhope stood by her guest on the front gallery as the dusty-topped buggy and the flea-bitten steed were being brought into enforced relations once more.

"I have it!" said Miss Denton, stopping in the act of pulling on her long black cotton gloves.

"Have what?"

Mrs. Stanhope was accustomed to her friend's explosive style of delivery.

"Who it is that child Olga reminds me of! I've been puzzling over it all day."

The children were standing together on the marble carriage block laden with Miss Denton's belongings. Olga's profile was turned toward them.

The glossy hair grew low down upon the smooth dark forehead, the little nose destroyed the classic

outline. Olga was prettiest when she was looking straight at you with her large earnest eyes.

"Well!" Mrs. Stanhope said a trifle impatiently.

"It is of my poor George."

"Mr. Trowbridge?"

"Yes," said Miss Denton, with her gaze still fixed upon the child's profile, "and if you had not picked her up so far north I should say—"

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Stanhope in her tartest voice. (So long as Olga was under her protection no foolish conjectures as to her origin would be tolerated.) "Then I may depend on you to take the children in hand from Monday," she asked in her business voice.

"Yes," said Miss Denton, "and I think I shall quite enjoy having the young things about me."

Then she clambered laboriously into her ancient buggy and turned the flea-bitten horse's head homeward.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. G. WARING TROWBRIDGE.

THE plantation bell on the Bendemma place filled an official position of three-fold importance, performing its various functions with an imperturbable impartiality that would have been creditable to officials of freer agency and higher grade. Of mornings, between the breaking of the dawn and the rising of the sun, it issued a clamorously imperative summons to all whom it might concern, to take up the burden of another day, casting behind them, as temptations of the evil one, the desire for a little more slumber, a little more sleep. When the day's work was over, and the soft evening air was redolent of frying bacon from a hundred cabins, it rang decorously, coaxingly, and prolongedly, inviting the faithful to prayers, in the long many-windowed "meetin'" house, that was the pride and glory of the place.

And yet again, when the angel of death hovered over the spot, and the untutored soul of any one of their number was called upon to answer the summons so full of dread mystery to those who staid behind, the

"Passing Bell" was rung solemnly, slowly, dolorously, in a lugubrious fashion that set every tortured cur within sound of it to yelping in dismal harmony, and made pause in each laborer's task, as with bated breath and frightened hearts, they spoke of the passing soul.

It was the morning summons alone, that held any significance for the mistress of the Bendemma place; and without precisely knowing why, it had come to be a point of honor with her to rise in prompt obedience to its first clang, whether she felt like it or not.

On this particular morning, she was ahead of the sun as she unlocked the door that gave on the back gallery and stood within the opening gazing out over the big unbeautiful yard, where was the wood-pile, the logs heaped in jack-straw confusion upon each other, and the large white ash-wood chips strewn thickly as they had flown from the shining ax-blade of the wood cutter; where was an unsightly heap of empty meal and pork barrels, pitched into the yard from the last spasmodic store-room cleaning, and destined eventually and gradually to disappear in form of dry-wood kindling for the green wood logs of the jack-straw wood-pile; where was the doorless stable, which furnished only partial shelter for the master's riding horse, a noble bay that stood now, arching his neck over the plank fence and gazing longingly toward the strip of pasture land whose joys he never tasted unless by open rebellion; where were three or four imprisoned calves, chewing

the mossy bark from the green wood waiting dumbly for the sweet by and by when they would enjoy a brief reunion with their mothers. The unlocking of the door was always the signal for the appearance of Gyp, the mistress's one pet, the shaggy yellow shepherd dog whose local habitation was in a turned down barrel on the side of the kitchen, to come frisking and waltzing and giving every manifestation possible to the canine race of extravagant joy at this diurnal resurrection of the idol of his life.

Mrs. G. Waring Trowbridge, as Gyp's mistress was somewhat sententiously called by Mr. G. Waring Trowbridge, Gyp's master, never failed to respond by laying a long white hand caressingly on his shaggy head for a moment in acknowledgment of his joyous morning salute, which was generally given in three very crisp barks.

Mrs. Trowbridge held in her hands a key-basket weighted down with big clumsy keys, badges of office and unrest. Notwithstanding it was very early morning, there was none of that freshly awakened activity about her that suggested a vivid interest in her surroundings or her occupations.

Apparently she was waiting for some one, and apparently that some one was in even less of a hurry than herself, about starting the domestic machinery a-whirring once more. Perhaps it was because of the dead monotony of those duties, the absolute flavorless-

ness of those days, that Mrs. Trowbridge found it easy to be patient. She had been waiting for things that came not all her life. There was a pathetic suggestiveness about this woman, that perhaps no one was more unconscious of than herself. She had begun the process of repression so long ago, so far back among the somber-tinted days she reckoned as her life, that she had almost lost sight of the flickering fancies and ambitious hopes of her girlhood.

Her husband declared her the best wife in the world. And if it had been the custom of the land to enter one's wife at competitive exhibitions, no doubt Mr. G. Waring Trowbridge would have entered his, glibly cataloguing and demonstrating her superiority to all other contestants, and would have carried off the first prize with that self-laudatory aspect one assumes who considers himself directly and indirectly responsible for the super-excellence of his exhibit.

Every one declared that if it had not been for this wife of his Mr. Trowbridge would have gone by the board long ago, for although every one was ready to admit that the master of Bendemma was the soul of honor, he certainly was phenomenal in his ability to mismanage his own affairs.

Perhaps this woman, standing there with the heavy key-basket, looking so preternaturally patient, was not devoid, at the outset, of every womanly woman's preference for leaning on something stronger than herself,

but she had never consciously admitted, even to herself, that her married life had been any thing but a shining success. As she stood there gazing out over the dewy fields, she was not indulging in any unwholesome retrospection, nor reviewing the somber battalions of her disappointments and blighted hopes; she was simply wondering in the most matter-of-fact fashion possible why it was, that she could not insure promptness on the part of her house-servants, when she set them such an unimpeachable example in early rising.

True, when she came to think of it, there was no especial reason why any one should be in a hurry in that sphere of life to which it had pleased God to doom her. For, after all was done, the days were so very much too long for her desires. Nevertheless there was an under current of energy about Mrs. Trowbridge which perforce of circumstances she expended in the dull routine of plantation life, that under happier auspices and more favorable conditions might have enabled her to carry some of her many strangled ambitions to a triumphant culmination. As it was, she was applying the steam power that would have propelled a heavily laden tow of barges up stream, to the task of sending an insignificant dredging-boat through the mud! Moreover, somewhere within her warped mental apparatus, was implanted a deathless conviction that as ye sow, so shall ye reap!

She was aware that things were at a pretty low

financial ebb on the Bendemma place, and foolishly holding that pluck and perseverance were all that were necessary for the final betterment of matters, she persisted in being very brisk and systematic at her household spigot, hoping that the good results thereof would eventually tell upon the larger and more important bung-hole of the plantation.

So, wisely or unwisely, Mrs. Trowbridge was pretty sure to be astir in time to catch the first glimpse of the sun as he rose over the dark line of the tree-tops that defined the eastern boundary of the estate, and shot great golden shafts earth-ward, illuminating the ragged water-willows that fringed the slough to the left of the house, lending fictitious and transitory brightness to the sluggish water at their feet. She loved the plantation best with this halo of morning glory resting upon it. The stubble of last year's imperfectly gleaned corn-crop rose thickly about the fields, wrapped from root to apex with the graceful tendrils of the tie-vine, whose tiny blue and white bells were gemmed with iridescent dew-drops ; the sun's first caress glorified them, later on his hot breath would shrivel the fragile flowerets into ugly insignificance. The dust from the passing teams would blot out the beauty of the crimson trumpet flower that flaunted so gayly now from every cross ditch and elder bush. The tramping of a hundred hoofs would trouble the waters of the little slough presently, and when the mules had slaked

their thirst it would be scarcely more than a mud-hole. But Mrs. Trowbridge had long since come to be a strict utilitarian. The useless was never the beautiful in her eyes. She could not afford to indulge in such luxuries, she would tell you. That longing for stir and activity which was not dead, but only sleeping in her breast, made her take a dull sort of satisfaction in watching the plantation awake to its modicum of energy.

The big bronze gobbler fluttered clumsily down from the tall turkey roost under the eaves of the corn-crib, and spreading his tail pompously, strutted slowly to and fro, sending a sententious gobble roostward, in token that he was ready to resume his official duties as chief of staff. Gyp never failed to condemn this matutinal gobbling with a sharply reproving bark, which Mrs. Trowbridge speedily repressed as inimical to Mr. G. Waring Trowbridge's morning repose. One by one the turkeys dropped earthward and joined the sedate procession that took its way to the corn-crib to forage among the mules. Mrs. Trowbridge took undue pride in her turkeys. She abhorred failure. The turkeys were the exponents of one of her few successes, so she regarded them with a feeling akin to gratitude for being so many and so sleek and so prosperous.

The cocks were crowing and fighting alternately, yonder in the hen house that had to be guarded so jealously against minks and coons, and the hens were clucking restlessly for liberty to be out and doing. 'Riah would

come presently and mix the feed for them, then Mrs. Trowbridge would slip up the little wooden slab and stand patiently waiting for the last one to step mincingly down the small ladder. There was no special reason for counting them every morning, only it killed another five or ten of the moments of which she had such a dreadful superfluity. Then she would go to the milk-room and skim last night's setting of cream, and start the morning's churning; from there to the garden to see if the okra and beet seed were breaking ground yet; then she would stir the batter for the corn griddle cakes for breakfast, (somehow 'Riah could never be trusted to get the batter just of the proper consistency, and if the cakes were not just right Mr. Trowbridge's entire breakfast would be spoiled), and then she would read until the hands of the clock pointed to a certain place, when she would wake George up. Sometimes her reading matter consisted of a magazine a month old, or a New Orleans paper a week old. She would have given her preference to sewing in the fresh morning hours (one can always muster energy for reading), but her sewing machine was one of Grover and Baker's earliest and noisiest make, and in moments of irritability Mr. Trowbridge had been known to call it that "d—d old grist-mill," since when Mrs. Trowbridge carefully avoided using her ancient sewing machine until Mr. Trowbridge was fairly out of sight and hearing, which was one of the ten thousand minute acts of

self-sacrifice which went toward preserving the harmony of Mrs. Trowbridge's home, without any recognition from the unconscious beneficiary of them all.

Finally 'Riah comes, tying on her bandanna as she walks, bringing into clinking contact a tin pail that is swung over one arm and a tin coffee-pot held in one hand. Mrs. Trowbridge has never disputed the legality of pail or pot, although she is well aware, and 'Riah is aware that she is aware, of the fact, that when 'Riah goes home at night the pail will be full of provisions and the pot of coffee for home consumption by 'Riah's old man, presumably an independent bread-winner. Mrs. Trowbridge is too genuine a lover of peace to stand upon her exact rights with 'Riah or any other privileged depredator. It wouldn't pay upon any consideration. So as 'Riah comes through the gate Mrs. Trowbridge's gaze is fastened upon the spotted calf, the youngest of the imprisoned offspring, whose head is held patiently close to the fence that the mother's tongue may caress it.

"You are late, 'Riah," this is the mistress's formula. 'Riah looks up at the sun, her only acknowledged monitor and stands convicted:

"My old man done had a pow'ful tussle wid de colick las' night! He eat too much cold colluds fur supper an' I didn't git no sleep tell de chickens was a-crowin' fur day."

Mrs. Trowbridge was aware, and 'Riah was aware that she was aware, of the purely imaginative nature of this

apology; but as 'Riah was called upon to manufacture three hundred and sixty-five excuses for tardiness in the course of a year, it was no small tax upon her powers of invention, and if the stamp of slovenly haste was somewhat too apparent upon her manufacture, who can blame her?

On this particular occasion Mrs. Trowbridge's objurgations to haste in the preparation for breakfast were unusually impressive.

"Mr. Trowbridge has some very important business to attend to this morning, 'Riah, which will take him up to Hardlines, you really must hurry a little."

"All right, Miss Nannie, I'll have dat breakfas' on de table befo' de cock crow trice."

'Riah was given to scriptural quotations which she was never known by any accident to get right or place appropriately.

Having thus set the domestic machinery smoothly running and oiled all the joints and made sure that things were in comfortable trim for an early breakfast, Mrs. Trowbridge ventured to break in upon Mr. Trowbridge's repose.

He had a business appointment to keep! Mr. Trowbridge was the soul of honor, and punctuality was one of his theoretical strong points!

CHAPTER V.

MR. G. WARING TROWBRIDGE.

MR. G. WARING TROWBRIDGE'S emergence from his chamber was like the breaking of another day, or the rising of another sun, so far as a fresh accession of activity was concerned, though the day that began with his up-rising was sometimes cloud beset, and the effulgence he cast off apt to be a trifle lurid.

The rhythmic sound of his boot heels, as he slowly paced the gallery that overlooked the yard premises, paring his shapely nails, was always the signal for Sandy, the hostler, to apply the curry-brush and comb in a perfect frenzy of determination to make the bay's glossy hide glossier yet, if possible, and for 'Riah's pots and pans to give forth uproarious manifestations of industry; and for Gyp to repeat his Waltz Delight with moderated raptures and some mental reservations, for Gyp had never learned to predicate with any degree of exactness the probabilities of his receiving a kick or a caress from the master, who, in his canine judgment, ranked as a vastly inferior production to the mistress.

But then Gyp's opportunities for judging were very limited, you know.

Mrs. Trowbridge laid down the mature magazine that had filled up a serene half hour for her, and joined her husband in his circumscribed promenade. They were a pleasing couple to look at. They had been called a very handsome couple by the wedding guests that had gathered at the big country wedding supper, and Mr. Trowbridge was still entitled to be so considered.

He was a typical Southerner in appearance. Tall, somewhat angular, easy and graceful in his movements, a long face covered with an abundant growth of black silky beard, a pair of luminous dark eyes, and a heavy suit of waving black hair. There was, however, a suggestion of chronic ennui about the man, which may have been the result of insufficient occupation for mind or body, but it left the impression with one, that on the whole Mr. G. Waring Trowbridge found life rather an unsatisfactory experiment.

Time had dealt more leniently with him than it had with his wife, about whose gentle eyes unmistakable crow's feet were discernible, and about the corner of whose mouth was a settled downward droop, that was pathetic in the extreme.

"You will be gone all day I suppose, George?" she said, linking her arm in his as he clasped his pen-knife and returned it to his pocket.

"Yes. All day certainly, and perhaps I shall not return before bed-time. If I'm not back by nine o'clock, don't sit up for me."

(Which was exactly what he knew she would do.)

"What shall you do with yourself?" he asked, not that he felt any very thrilling interest in the reply.

"Oh! I shall do well enough. I've some sheets to hem, and I think four or five of my Plymouth rock hens will be coming off with broods to-day, and I want to direct Sandy about preparing the ground for the sweet potatoes and —"

Mr. Trowbridge smiled in his superior way.

"What a blessing it is you women find these small industries so soul-satisfying."

It had never occurred to Mrs. Trowbridge that they were soul-satisfying, but she had found out long ago that the only substitute for the unattainable joys of which she still sometimes dreamed wistfully, was to crowd the hours to their utmost capacity with whatever her hands found to do. Another fixed rule of her life was, never to contradict her husband on a slight provocation. Mr. Trowbridge was argumentative, and would rush into controversy on the slimmest pretext. Mrs. Trowbridge was careful never to offer that pretext.

"By the way, Nannie, this is ration day. I shall have to get you to attend to it for me. Sandy can weigh the meat and measure the meal, if you will just keep an account of who gets it."

Mrs. Trowbridge was so used to supplementing her own duties with those of her husband, that she simply said, "Yes, George," as they turned indoors in answer to the breakfast bell.

Later on Mr. Trowbridge stood with his horse's bridle in his hand, impatiently tapping his boot with his whip, while Sandy readjusted the saddle. Sandy had been trying for a great many years now to learn how to locate that saddle precisely to the master's liking. Either Sandy was very obtuse, or the master very exacting. Each had his own private opinion on the subject. But the saddle had always to be readjusted.

"Isn't this rather a strange time of the year for Mrs. Stanhope to come over to the swamp?" Mrs. Trowbridge asked, standing waiting for her lord's deliberate departure.

"A little unusual, but hardly strange. She writes me word that there's some snarl about that money of Eustis's that she loaned old Dennison, thinking it would be such a good investment. Then she wants advice about new gin-stands, and a few more cabins. In short, you know what Mrs. Stanhope's 'friendly consultations' mean."

"Poor woman! I'm sure I'm glad she has you for an adviser, George. Every body else, the agent, and the commission merchant, and her manager, have interested views. Besides, so long as you are Eustis's

legal guardian, I suppose it is your duty to see that this property is well taken care of. You will have a lovely day for your ride."

Mr. Trowbridge vaulted lightly into the saddle, arranged his stirrups and said: "Yes, it is pleasant. By the way, Nannie, there is no good reason why you should not have gone with me. You would have enjoyed a talk with Mrs. Stanhope. I am sorry I did not think of it sooner. But it is late now, and the buggy wheels need greasing, and —"

"Oh! never mind me! I shall do very well," Mrs. Trowbridge answered with customary self-abnegation, and smiled pleasantly at her handsome husband.

"By-by then! Amuse yourself until I get back."

Thus airily casting off all responsibility for his wife's day, Mr. Trowbridge cantered briskly away through the fresh spring air. His horse was a delightful riding animal. Mr. Trowbridge was always well mounted. His route, the most of the way, lay through pleasant woodland, where the fragrance of the sweet gum heavily scented the atmosphere; where myriad birds twittered and fussed over the location and architectural details of their new nests; where gray and black squirrels chased each other fearlessly from tree to tree, enjoying that immunity from terror that plowing time, by giving other occupation to the freedmen, alone secured them; where the delicate patterns of

the half-grown foliage were re-traced in shifting shadows on the sun-lit path. Not a bad outlook!

Mrs. Trowbridge watched man and horse until an abrupt curve in the road suddenly deprived her of that mild recreation. Then she turned in-doors rather listlessly. The day was so lovely and so tempting. She wished George had thought of the buggy in due season! She would have loved so to ride through the woods on this bright spring morning. She saw in fancy the dew-drops still lingering on the long sprays of the blackberry bushes in the corners of the fences! She was in accord with the anxious little feathered architects of the woods too, and loved to catch the saucy bright eye of the frisky squirrels. Then too, as it had been months since she had enjoyed the privilege of talking with a woman of her own color, she would have gladly ridden that eight miles to have said "howdy" to Mrs. Stanhope. She looked at the clock! Only nine! Twelve hours of dismal solitude to be gotten through with as best she might! She turned resolutely toward the noisy old sewing machine. She would hem all those sheets to-day. There was no one to be annoyed by the clatter. She smiled a trifle bitterly at the recollection of her husband's injunction to "amuse herself." How and with what, she wondered! She could always work! It was her solace. Her nerve restorer. So, with the pile of unhemmed sheets in a chair by her side she set

the machine in motion, and as it rattled a tuneless accompaniment, 'Riah, in the kitchen uncomfortably close at hand, lifted up her voice in melodious assertion that "There's restin' by and by."

'Riah was always songful when Mr. Trowbridge rode away.

And thus Mrs. Trowbridge amused herself.

CHAPTER VI.

HARDLINES.

HARDLINES was the name of Mrs. Stanhope's swamp place. The plantation over on the Louisiana side of the river, which although it was the bone and sinew of all her prosperity, and the power behind the throne to which Stanhope Hall was indebted for its stately luxury, she always visited with a sense of condescension, in no way diminished by the abject reverence paid her by the humble tenants thereof.

The quaint nomenclature of Southern plantation homes, offers an interesting field for research to the curious, as some connection is generally traceable between the name of a place and the disposition and future of its original owners, who are, presumably, its sponsors in baptism. How Hardlines came by its peculiarly significant but rather repellent cognomen, was not at all conjectural. The place had been in the Stanhope family for only three generations past. When the grandfather of Mrs. Stanhope's husband had redeemed it from its primitive wildness he had sworn a rough oath that it should be "hard lines with

him, if he did not render it one of the most attractive and valuable places on the Mississippi River between Vicksburg and New Orleans." He had kept his oath with such inflexibility, that the place, as it appeared to the eyes of Mr. Trowbridge, cantering briskly toward its quarter yard this fresh spring morning certainly did not suggest that the lines had fallen to its present owner in very hard places. Hardlines was one of the show places of the parish, and as Mrs. Stanhope swept its broad acres with the strong field-glass which formed a portion of the furniture of the house at Hardlines, she felt quite a glow of self-satisfaction over the neat and trim aspect of the place.

Thirteen hundred acres of cleared land fringed about with as many more of wood-land, alternate ridges and low lying sloughs, not uncomely features with their dark clear water, thickly sown with creamy water-lilies, formed the real estate characteristics of the inheritance that Eustis Stanhope was destined to come into, not many years hence. The cabins that stood in a sort of hollow square around a space in which were symmetrically planted a number of locust trees, were uniform in design, substantial in structure, and without reproach in the matter of leaky roofs and unreliable chimneys. Every couple of cabins was linked together by a cistern and its tributary gutters. In the midst of the clustering locusts, whose white flower clusters flung a heavy sweetness out on the morning air, stood the

meeting house, which was the architectural feature of the quarters, eclipsed only by the stately gin-house nearer the river. The four gates which gave ingress to the quarter yard from the different points of the compass were all new and strong and possessed individually of hinges that hinged, and latches that latched. No ordinary boast in that locality. The steam gin on the place was its special glory, being a new and modernized triumph of masonry, machinery and roominess, for which Mr. Trowbridge himself felt a double degree of admiration, such as one feels for a thing of beauty in whose creation one has had a hand.

Mr. Trowbridge was Mrs. Stanhope's friendly adviser, as well as her son's legal guardian, so that his interest in the affairs of Hardlines was only secondary to that felt in Bendemma place. His advice and masculine judgment had been called into requisition when the burning of the Hardlines gin, by a laborer dissatisfied with the year's settlement, had necessitated rebuilding, and he quite prided himself on the outcome.

After the meeting house and the gin, the residence on the place was quite insignificant. A small five-roomed cottage, white-washed extensively, wood-ceiled interiorly, set squarely in a square yard in the midst of the cotton fields, possessing all the advantages of a good outlook, none of the attractions of a home. A few walnut and cotton-wood and fig and pecan trees,

planted irregularly within the plank inclosure, with a small plot set apart for flowers, should any one care to grapple with the weeds that flourished so luxuriously and achieved greatness with such magical quickness, comprised the premises. But it was "good enough." The plantation house had been but a small item in the calculation of owners who vibrated between some northern watering place in summer, New Orleans in winter and a permanent (?) hill residence, yielding ready credence to the fiction that it was unhealthy on the plantation, save during that short period in the spring time, when the fish bit well, and it was lawful yet to hunt the abundant game of the woods.

Mr. Trowbridge glanced with some surprise over the fence, as he dismounted at the rack close by the front gate, to where two childish forms, their faces completely screened from observation, were plying rakes and hoes, very much too large for their tiny hands, in unskilled vigor, about a small mound of earth they had rescued from the grassy chaos.

"Hillo, who have we here?" He touched the sunbonnets with his riding whip as he came opposite the small mound builders on his way across the grass-grown brick walk to the house.

Olga and Virginia started from their stooping posture, and pushing back the cumbersome sunbonnets that had such a bothersome trick of slipping over their noses, displayed to Mr. Trowbridge's still

more astonished eyes two pretty white faces and four wondering eyes.

His glance wandered from Ginia's blonde head and fair skin to Olga's serene face and lovely eyes. There his gaze rested with a puzzled look at first, then it deepened into one of — well — dismay, it would seem.

"Where did you children come from, and who do you belong to anyway?"

Mr. Trowbridge asked this question with the asperity that always came into his voice when something jarred upon the finely spun organization which was presumed to constitute his nerves.

Virginia's invariable instinct was to take shelter in Olga. She did it now promptly. Shrinking closer to the child who had been friend and protector ever since she had taken her by the hand when forsaken of all the rest of the world, and led her sobbing into the presence of the matron, she fastened her black eyes upon their interlocutor in a half frightened stare.

Mr. Trowbridge laughed a mechanical mirthless laugh at her action and attitude. His chief interest seemed centered in Olga.

"Who are you, child?"

"We are Mrs. Stanhope's orphans, sir, and, oh, please, you are standing right on our zenia seed, they are in that paper. We want to make a flower garden here."

He stepped back from the seed, shoved the package carelessly forward with his boot, and said:

"Then you live here?"

"No, sir. We live over at Stanhope Hall. We're just going to stay here one month. And we are sorry, for it's so pretty, and we love the river and the boats, don't we, Ginia? and would rather stay always."

"Then you never lived here?"

"Oh, no, sir, we lived in Cleveland, a great way from here."

"And you are sisters?" There was almost a coaxing sound in the voice that asked this question.

"Oh, no, sir, Virginia is a little girl that I found one morning crying at our gate, and because I found her it seems like she belonged to me."

"Whose gate?"

"The gate of the 'sylum that Mrs. Stanhope took us from."

"And who found you?"

"I don't know, sir. I think I lived there for always."

"To be sure! no doubt! and—I'm an accursed fool, that's all." Mr. Trowbridge muttered these words more to himself than in answer to Olga. Then he took his handkerchief out and wiped his brow, still looking down upon Mrs. Stanhope's orphans in a meditative fashion that was decidedly disconcerting to them.

"I wish he'd go on! I'm 'fraid of him."

Ginia never meant this whisper to float from the shelter of her sun-bonnet up to the altitude of Mr. Trowbridge's ears, but it did nevertheless, and had the effect apparently of startling him from a profound reverie, for he laughed again in that mechanical mirthless fashion, and moved on toward the house, where he was soon involved in one of the perennial discussions which he and Mrs. Stanhope held touching Eustis and his affairs:

"You know," said Mrs. Stanhope, re-tying a package of papers that Mr. Trowbridge had been looking over, "the desire of my life is, that when Eustis comes into his property, he shall have no occasion for reproaching his mother with lack of devotion to his material interests. I'm quite sure Hardlines is in much better condition than when his poor father came into possession of it. In fact, it is in prime condition for his occupancy, I think."

Mrs. Stanhope's eyes wandered through the open windows of the room where this interview was taking place, out over the loamy acres, where a score or more of plows were visible breaking ground for another crop. Beyond that, to where the white and green of the quarters made so pleasing a picture of thrift and careful supervision. She was evidently satisfied with the stewardship now drawing to a close.

"Eustis, you know," she said, in continuance of the only subject that held any interest for her, "will be of

age this coming June three years. That will pass like a day."

"Yes! I know! but—you spoke a little while back of Hardlines being ready for his occupancy! You don't mean that Eustis shall make his home here?"

"That will be as he sees best. I expect my son to use his own discretion when he shall have attained his majority. My preference would be for him to remain with me always. But—who knows? Boys tire of their mother's society quicker than of any other."

Mr. Trowbridge fastened his dark eyes upon her face almost imploringly as he said: "Whatever you do, do not let Eustis take up his residence on this place when he leaves college. There is no surer way on earth of sending him to the dogs. There is no society, no rational entertainment, nothing! A man must either turn monk or devil."

"You went to live on Bendemma when you were fresh from college, and I am sure——"

"Don't cite me, whatever you do! Gad, I should hate to know of any boy duplicating my life. And yet"—he shook off his growing excitement by an effort—laughed—and resumed his seat—"I suppose there are worse men in the world."

Mrs. Stanhope followed his motions and words with no little surprise. While entertaining the most exalted opinion of Mr. Trowbridge's judgment and practical good sense, she had never had occasion to think him

lacking in self-esteem ; therefore, this violent and voluntary self-abasement struck her as altogether without parallel in her experience of Eustis's guardian.

Olga came silently into the room and stood unnoticed at Mrs. Stanhope's elbow. She had a request to prefer, but was too well-bred to interrupt her elders.

"What does that little gipsy want? I know she has a petition. I see it in her eyes. Let her offer it, please, and then we will look over those last accounts of sales. Your cotton ought to have brought ten and an eighth. It was middling fair."

Mr. Trowbridge nodded to Olga, then took up a bulky package of papers from the open desk.

Olga only wanted permission for herself and Ginia to walk down to the river's edge to throw sticks in for Shep to swim after. To see Shep, the big black dog who belonged to the Hardlines establishment, plunge into the swift-flowing current of the Mississippi River, was a source of perpetual delight to the two orphans. She glided swiftly out of sight as soon as Mrs. Stanhope's rather indifferent, "of course, child," fell on her ear.

"Who is that child?" Mr. Trowbridge asked, following the little slim figure with his eyes as she gleefully bounded back to where Ginia was waiting.

Then Mrs. Stanhope gave him a full account of how Olga had, in a manner, been forced upon her by Virginia's refusal to come without her.

"Virginia is beautiful," she said, with pride in her

own good taste, "but Olga is an immensely useful little creature."

"I have seen them both and should say the gipsy was the prettier of the two. But what did you want with them?"

"I can't say that I did want them. I wanted one. You know Eustis will be a man soon, and, of course, he will be filling his life with a young man's pleasures and distractions. I look forward to the time when Virginia will replace by a daughter's care and affection, the void that will be left when Eustis takes to himself a wife."

"If there is any thing in physiognomy your chances of a daughter's care and affection are better with the gipsy. The child has a noble face."

Mrs. Stanhope made a repellent gesture with her long thin hands.

"Never! never! do you know——"

Then there came to her in time to seal her lips the promise she had given to that gentle humanitarian (from whose impartial guardianship she had taken Olga as well as Virginia), never to permit any suspicion that might enter her own mind to escape at her lips.

"Do I know what?" Mr. Trowbridge looked her so determinedly in the face, that her eyes fell before his, and substitution for her interrupted utterance became awkwardly difficult.

"Do you know, I was about to say, I sometimes think

perhaps I made a mistake in taking these children in hand at all! When I was up North, I was made to feel like such a cumberer of the earth, that I thought I should really enjoy trying to do good to somebody—"

"And don't you enjoy it?"

"Yes—but—I can hardly explain to you what strange misgivings I have about that child, Olga, sometimes. She seems—she seems, well, not like other children. There is something so intensely quiet about her. She impresses one with the idea of having been suppressed in her infancy. There is nothing joyous about her. But she is a good docile little creature, and a real comfort to me at all times."

"Then, why worry? Accept the goods the gods provide ye, and let the dim future take care of itself. How old is she?" Mr. Trowbridge's voice had resumed its accustomed airy levity which conveyed the impression, generally, of a refusal to give serious consideration to any thing beyond the most urgent demands of the hour.

"Virginia is ten and Olga is fourteen. They have been with me now several years. This is the first time I have let them leave off their lessons to come to Hardlines with me, and they enjoy it immensely."

Mr. Trowbridge rose while she was talking. The morning had slipped away over their papers and discussions. The early dinner hour was approaching. Then his ride homeward—it had just occurred to him

he would stop on the way home to see an old pensioner of his, formerly his slave.

"And Eustis?" he said, somewhat inconsequently.

"Will be twenty-one in little more than three years. Excuse me, your impatience is visible. You have a long ride ahead of you, and the Hardlines cook is celebrated for unpunctuality."

She left the room, and Mr. Trowbridge paced the floor restlessly. He stopped in front of the window that overlooked the ragged little mound where the children had deposited their precious seed. The hoes and the rakes lay on the ground just as they had flung them, when the sight of Shep's red lolling tongue had suggested the river to them.

That girl is going to develop into a dusky divinity. Fourteen and eighteen! Mrs. Trowbridge has sown dragon seed. I—must see old Dora.

These interjectional clews to Mr. Trowbridge's vein of thought seemed to force their way to his lips. He had the habit of many men who have much time for lonely reflection, uttering audibly things never meant for other ears.

The clangor of a bell that might have done duty successfully in a four-storied tavern, smote upon his ear with torturing vibrations. He promptly obeyed the clamorous summons to dinner.

He faced Mrs. Stanhope at table, but on the right sat Olga.

Olga, with her nut-brown skin, her waving glossy-black hair, and her wonderful eyes; so large, so soft, so dark, and——so familiar to the master of the Bendemma plantation.

CHAPTER VII.

OLD DORA.

WHEN Mr. Trowbridge rode away from Hardlines an hour or two later, he turned his horse's head in the direction of his own place without once sending his thoughts in advance toward the lonely woman he had left behind him. The sun was still high in the heavens, and he would have plenty of time in which to execute his original plan of going through the gin, to see that the "stands" and "saws" and "brushes" had been properly put away after the taking-off of the last crop; but he was impelled forward by a feeling of dissatisfaction and unrest. The bridle-rein hung loosely over his horse's arching neck. He was permitted to select his own gait, and got over the ground in a lazy sort of fox-trot, whinneying gently now and then in pleased anticipation, no doubt, of soon resting within the sacred precincts of his own stall. Perhaps equine reflections on the superiority of his own grassland to that at Hardlines filled his brain to the exclusion of any thought over the passage of time, for every now and then he would deliberately halt and bite off

the tender top-shoots from the sassafras or other bushes that swung tantalizingly close to his nose. A more deliberate pause than usual aroused his rider from an attitude of listless indifference.

Mr. Trowbridge gave the reins a violent jerk, supplementing it by an unprovoked application of the whip. The bay was used to this explosive change of moods on the part of his master, and, no doubt, had long since instituted injurious comparisons between men and beasts. Philosophically pricking up his ears, he trotted steadily forward, heroically regarding the nodding sassafras sprouts askance through the corners of his eye, bearing forward like a horse with an object in view, until he was once more reminded of the curb, and of the presence of a superior being, by being turned off the public road into a crooked but well-defined path, that led to an outlying field on the Bendemma place, which, owing to its near proximity to the woodlands, had been selected as the location of the stock-minder's cabin.

Through the woods, redolent of sweet gums, and brightened by the low, wide-branching dog-wood in the full of its snowy blossom-tide, man and horse kept on their way until the gleam of a new rail fence penetrated the gathering shadows; and to this fence Mr. Trowbridge hitched his horse and climbed over the stile that led to the cabin it inclosed, scattering by his ingress a noisy flock of geese, ducks and chickens that were

fluttering and fussing about the door-step in impatient demand for the evening meal.

The cabin was comfortable and new, and a concession to the ornamental requirements of the age had been made by painting the door in alternate streaks of green and brown. A smooth sleek yellow dog bounded fiercely around the corner, at sound of foot-falls, gave one aggressive bark, recognized the master, and came squirming and cringing with an apologetic whine to his feet. Mr. Trowbridge stood upon the lower of the two cypress puncheons that formed the front steps and rapped smartly on the gallery floor as a summons. The ducks, relieved from their first apprehensions, waddled back and quacked close about him. The geese craned their long necks inquisitively around his heels. A second and more prolonged application of his leaded whip handle to the gallery floor was answered by a voice in his rear.

He turned toward it. An old man, bent with age, was climbing over the stile with a sack of corn swung across his back and a cow's horn, attached to a long leathern thong, swaying from his neck.

"Reck'n Dora mus' be plantin' her okry seed out'n her truck patch, boss; she git deefer and deefer every year. I'll fotch her wid de horn ef you want to see her."

"Yes, I want to see her, Reub, but never mind the horn. I can find her. How are your hogs?"

"Hogs! whar's any hogs! who kin raise hogs whar's thar's ten niggers to steal 'em to every one that tries to raise 'em hones'? whar's any hogs! I ain't got none. Ben on my feet ever sence ten o'clock this mornin' lookin' fur that ole blue sow Bet. I tell you, boss, if I wur in yo' place—" Mr. Trowbridge who knew by experience that whenever Reub reached the advisory point, he was prepared to supplement complaint with a series of amendatory suggestions, hastened to extinguish him.

"Well, old man, something really must be done to protect your industries. Come down to the house to-morrow and we will talk it all over. At present I am in something of a hurry. I want to see Dora for a few moments. I'll go to her in the garden."

"All right, boss. I'se got them mules to feed yit, and you knows the way to ole woman's truck patch."

So Mr. Trowbridge soon found himself in presence of the woman whom he had ridden three miles out of his way to see, and whose comfortable maintenance was one of his especial obligations; for helpless and useless as old Dora was now, she had been much to her master in the old days. What she had been to him in the ante-bellum days, (when, fresh from college, he had come into his majority and the management of his own property simultaneously), it would be hard to describe and impossible to over-rate.

When he had selected to make his permanent resi-

dence on the plantation, bringing to bear upon his new life a plenitude of luxurious habits and a total lack of practical experience of any sort, he had installed Dora, (who had been trained by his mother, long since dead, in all housewifely skill), as his housekeeper and general superintendent of domestic affairs, and had never found cause to regret his choice, at least so far as his own material interests had been concerned.

Dora was one of those characters, plentiful enough at one time in the South, but rarely if ever to be met with now, for good and patent reasons.

Then the matrons of the South imparted all of their own skill and knowledge of housewifery to some one of their slaves, selected for superior intelligence, assured that the labor she bestowed in instructing would be compensated for ten-fold in her own old age or in the new life of married son or daughter. Then it was until death did them part between mistress and maid. No Southern plantation house was complete without just such an official as old Dora had been to young Trowbridge.

If the old Grecian custom of erecting temples commemorative of certain characters or events still prevailed, a fane to the extinct Southern mammy might be in order.

Without being either the cook, the milk-woman, the laundress, the gardener or the house-maid, there was not one of these functionaries whose place she could

not fill most satisfactorily on occasion, and all of whom regarded her with an admixture of admiration and terror. Always patient, cheerful and energetic, the careless young master had accepted his comfort at her hands, very much as he accepted greater comforts at a higher Hand, not exactly thanklessly, but thoughtlessly, and as altogether a matter of course.

Personally Dora would be best described by negations. She was not good looking, she was not symmetrical, she was not graceful. She was just fat, tall, strong, yellow and wrinkled; with small black twinkling eyes; with coarse black straight hair, in which she took exceeding pride, as affording irrefragable proof that her boast of Indian blood had some foundation in fact.

Dora had other Indian characteristics; among them implacable hatred for any one who had ever inflicted upon her an injury, real or fancied.

When Mr. Trowbridge had brought a wife home to the Bendemma place, Dora, then in the sixth year of her undisputed reign over the premises, had resented it so sullenly and viciously, albeit wordlessly, that Mrs. Trowbridge had insisted upon her removal.

Dora had not waited for this indignity to be put upon her. She had resigned the keys of office with the dignity of royalty abdicating, and requested permission to retire to the lower sphere of a field hand.

Mr. Trowbridge holding a forced hand had accepted

her resignation. That had all happened before "Reb times" as Dora herself would have told you.

But, either from gratitude or from some more enduring motive, Mr. Trowbridge had never ceased to charge himself with Dora's maintenance, even when, as a free woman she was possessed of the inalienable right of migration or starvation or any other privilege of citizenship.

For Mr. Trowbridge, Dora had always retained the most loyal affection and reverence.

For Mrs. Trowbridge she nourished the most uncompromising animosity.

At the time of Dora's coming into power her family had consisted of a husband, two stalwart sons and an undeniably pretty daughter several shades lighter in complexion than herself. But when "Reb times come" the boys had gone to join the army of their liberators and Rosetta—well, Rosetta, she too, later on, had been seized with the contagion that possessed the newly freed, and one morning old Dora awoke to find that she was bereaved indeed, and that her husband, old, rheumatic, and never an object of over-fondness on her part, constituted her only family tie.

Mr. Trowbridge had condoled with her, with apparent sincerity, when, on his own return from the four years' useless struggle he found her still weeping for her pretty Rosetta and refusing to be comforted, but Dora had received his condolence in stubborn silence.

Mr. Trowbridge never failed to inquire semi-annually into the condition of Dora's health and the state of her larder, but as his periodical visit was not due by a full month yet, Dora looked up from her okra-planting with natural surprise as she heard his voice coming to her, over her garden fence.

"Well, mammy, how does your garden grow. Like Mistress Mary's?—With cockle shells and fairy bells and cowslips in a row?" he quoted. Dora was used to his bantering style of address in the olden time when she had been so necessary to his comfort, and she brightened visibly now at sound of his voice.

"Go 'way, chile," she made answer, recklessly casting the remainder of her okra seeds in one spot, and hobbling toward him, "I don't know nothin' 'bout cockle shells, but I 'lows cuckle burs is comin' up right lively in this 'ere truck patch."

Then leaning on the inner side of the fence from him she poured into his patient and sympathetic ears the accumulated worries and trials of the period intervening since his last visit. He had expected this and was ready with a proposed remedy for every woe. But the sun was sinking beneath the tree-tops, and even by taking all the short cuts he could not reach home now before late supper time. Dora was garrulous, even more so than usual.

The prolonged tooting of old Reub's horn signified that the plow-hands were at liberty to stop work.

"I must be going now, old lady." Mr. Trowbridge broke a long splinter from the rough picket on which his hand was resting, but made no other motion toward departing.

"Well, chile, 'tis gittin'dark sho' 'nough, an' you'll be gittin' a col' in yo' back fus' thing."

Mr. Trowbridge stood absently chewing the end of the splinter he had broken off.

"I say, Aunt Dora! you've never heard from—Rosa yet!" there was a strange hesitancy in his voice and manner.

Dora's face grew a shade darker. Her hand shook as she lifted it on high. Her shrill voice was high-pitched with excitement:

"No, and I hopes to God I never will. I can't, you know!"

"You're hard on her," said the master, throwing away the splinter, and feeling in his pocket for the tobacco which old Dora always exacted as a parting douceur.

"Hard on her! Me hard on her? Me, the po' ole mammy that loved her better'n I ever loved God-a-mighty hisself? An' de Lord done punish me for it. He done punish me wid the loneliness in my old age, and de back-ache, and de pains which racks me day en night. Ef she'd only a waited a leetle wile longer it ud a ben better. She warn't in no fix to be knockin' bout the worl. Po' gal! My purty gal Rosa."

Then with sudden violence old Dora put out both shriveled hands repellently.

"Go 'way, chile, go 'way, 'fore I gits hot en forgits that you's you, en me's me."

Instead she hobbled vigorously away herself leaving Waring Trowbridge alone by the gate.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROSETTA.

THE lost Rosetta had been at once old Dora's shame and her pride! The shame, however, was but dimly recognized as such. What would you have? Had not Dora's own mitigated hue its origin in an admixture of white blood in which she openly gloried? Did not the somewhat pallid bronze of her own color authorize her proud boast of being "mixed Ingun en w'ite folks en nary drap uv nigger!" And when, transmitted through a fresh infusion of white blood into her child's veins, the result was so satisfying from a physiological point of view, how could she grieve? She was undoubtedly the mother of the prettiest girl in all that neighborhood.

The virtual master of the Bendemma plantation during Waring Trowbridge's minority had been an overseer of marked good-looks, but who, in common with all his class, was devoid of refinement and entirely uneducated. Natural shrewdness and plenty of energy were the only prerequisites for a good overseer. His small straight nose, well shaped mouth and fine brows were clearly traceable in Rosetta's pretty face, but to

the coarser maternal contribution she was indebted for her soft large eyes, abundant black hair and strong perfect teeth, as also for the superb setting of her head upon a pair of very erect shoulders.

Many a crime is converted into a peccadillo by custom or trend of local thought. How could Dora, all untutored as she was, be expected to entertain any very acute perceptious of the divine origin of chastity, or the holiness of conjugal fidelity. In an atmosphere where the social restrictions that hedge virtue about with a thorny safe-guard are confined exclusively to the upper and fairer ranks of womankind, why should one whom no one recognized as belonging to the hedged-in sisterhood voluntary prick herself with its thorns? If indeed "where is no law, is no transgression," then was Dora without sin among her fellows in the particular of her pretty Rosetta. And so the mother's pride naturally and immeasurably out-weighed the woman's shame.

With all her mental deficiencies and moral imperfections more than counterbalanced by her extreme prettiness and an amount of vivacity that made her mother call her "the peertest as well as the purtiest gal of 'em all," the child Rosetta, by the time she was ten years old, had become the object of her mother's very injudicious idolatry. It pleased the woman's ignorant fancy to see the girl flitting as free as a bird about the "big house" that stood tenantless during Rosetta's childhood, and Waring Trowbridge's college days. The

house was exclusively under Dora's charge, and, while she did the periodic scrubbing and cleaning and airing, the child would flit about the unpeopled rooms after her, growing quite familiar with her own bright face in the dusty mirrors in the darkened chambers, and acquiring perilously luxurious habits as she experimented on all the easy chairs by turns, or tested the softness of the beds and lounges, or swayed lazily to and fro in the netted hammock on the front gallery until she came to feel quite a proprietary interest in the master's belongings, regarding his final home-coming from college as an end of her peaceful reign and the intrusion of a usurper. Dora took a secret delight in the apparent oneness between the child and her refined surroundings at the cottage, and she shared Rosetta's regrets that the home-coming of her young master would debar her from these stolen delights of social eminence. She found it harder than usual to take the girl back to the cabin at the other end of the quarter-lot, on the night before Waring was expected to reach Bendemma.

"She b'longs just thar," she said, standing patiently on the threshold of the young man's bed-room, waiting to lock up for the night. She smiled with patient indulgence on Rosetta, who willfully lingered in the big plush rocking-chair, saucily nodding to her own image in the big glass of the dressing-case as she rocked with tremendous vigor. Then, when patience ceased to be

a virtue, she sent a gentle "Come, honey, mammy's a-waitin'," back into the darkening room, with no apparent effect. Rosetta rocked on, as she jerked out an answer: "Wait, mammy! It's the ve'y las' time! I'll haff t' keep away fum y'here w'en w'ite folks come. Oh! it's so nice here! I'se gwine t' let de cat die!" And Dora waited with supernatural patience until the rocking came to a slow, gradual stop, and the girl joined her in the doorway, flushed, tired and petulant. But altogether lovely in the mother's eyes.

Under more rigid skies, Dora's satisfaction in her pretty offspring might have found its alloy on her own hearthstone. As it was, it was not only unmixed, but was shared by Reuben, Rosetta's accredited father, and Dora's complacent husband. Reuben, never backward in expending the full force of parental authority or unparental wrath upon the two boys of ebon-hued authenticity that completed his family circle, was scarcely behind Dora herself in injudicious efforts to convince Rosetta that she was born into the ornamental ranks of society, and must demean herself accordingly. By dint of constantly assuring her, that "she wur cut out fur a lady, she wur," or that "she wurn't never meant fur a fiel' han', she wurn't," the two had succeeded, to their own satisfaction, in reducing Rosetta, by the time she was eighteen years old, to an attractive, but altogether undesirable, appanage to the Bendemma establishment.

It was only at first that Rosetta frowned upon the owner of the cottage in which she had come to feel so much at home as an unwelcome usurper! Only at first that she shunned the big house.

Rosetta being what they all between them had made of her, and Dora being as she was, her fond heart was well-nigh broken in twain, when, one morning in the second year of the war, she awoke to find herself childless, and, like Rachel of old, refused to be comforted. The two boys and Rosetta gone! Reuben and she left alone to wonder and to grieve! The Marine Brigade had been anchored in the river, just off the Bendemma place, the night before! It was gone now! It was not hard to guess how the "children" had gotten away! The Marine Brigade worked woe for some hearthstone whenever it cast anchor off the defenseless plantations! Such bereavements were of every-day occurrence in those troubled times! Children, young and lusty, eagerly hastening forward to meet the blue-coated heralds of freedom "half way!" Parents, old and incredulous, waiting in patient bondage until the wondrous story should be proved true beyond a peradventure! Youth impetuously grasping at the opportunity to enter upon the new and untried privileges of the freeman! Age, timorously questioning whether the old order were not the best that mortal man could desire! It had happened all around her, to all her neighbors, even in the Bendemma quarters; but

that such a blow should fall on her, much less be dealt her by the beloved hand of her petted Rosetta, had never presented itself to Dora as even a remote possibility. And when the blow did fall, it was with such crushing force that she was never the same afterward. She went about the cabin on the first morning of her bereavement with the restless activity of one to whom inactivity was pain. She could not be idle even in her woe! From the wash-tub, where she toiled laboriously over the board until the white lather hid the murky water, she walked softly, as if there was some dead thing there that must be dealt with reverently, toward where Reuben sat brooding and troubled. With the habit of life-long dependence upon a stronger race in full force within her, she said to him, in suppressed lamentation: "Reube, ole man, I'd take it some easier ef ole miss were 'bove groun' to talk wid! My w'ite folks allers seemed to smoove things out fur me."

And Reuben, lifting his bowed head, answered with grim significance: "W'ite folks ain' smooved things out this time, ole woman! That gal ain' never cheeped sence the Rifles lef' de parish."

(The Rifles was the company that Waring Trowbridge had gone out in command of very promptly! looking very bright and handsome and gay in his new gray uniform.)

And Dora had said, with a sob in her voice: "You're

right, Reube! You're right, ole man," and then had gone savagely to work again at the wash-tub.

But all this had happened long years before the evening when Mr. Trowbridge, chewing a splinter broken from her garden-fence, had aroused old Dora to a trembling pitch of wrath by carelessly asking her about her daughter.

CHAPTER IX.

A RETURNED WANDERER.

"CONGRATULATE me, children!"

Mrs. Stanhope laid an open letter down on her lap and taking off her eye-glasses wiped the eyes and then the glasses and smiled benignantly upon Ginia first, allowing the remnant of her satisfaction as it were to alight upon Olga's eagerly receptive face.

"Your son is coming home!" It is Olga who defines the source of her joy.

"Yes."

They were sitting together in the pleasant library at Stanhope Hall, with all the windows and doors wide open. Through them an overpowering odor of cape jasmine floated from the great shrubs that shed their yellowing petals close by the hall door. The good news had not come as a surprise, for Mrs. Stanhope had herself fixed the season of her son's return, but the letter that she sat handling in a caressing fashion was to tell her that he was actually coming in one month, and her joy thereat overflowed in that sudden demand for congratulation.

"He has never been home since he first went away,

has he?" Olga asked, skillfully prolonging the mother's pleasure, and herself entering eagerly into the great joy that came into the eyes and voice of her benefactress whenever Eustis was the theme.

"No, we both thought it best not. It was expensive and not advisable for either of us. It would have spoiled me, if not him."

"Mercy! Then you hardly know how your own son looks!" says Ginia, whose forte was not imagination, and who was sordidly practical with all her dainty personality.

"He has sent a multiplicity of photos home!" says Mrs. Stanhope, turning loving eyes toward where the latest edition of Eustis Stanhope hung in an elaborate frame over her sewing machine. "Olga, the light on that picture is miserable. It was you who suggested hanging it there."

There was a sharp intonation of dissatisfaction in the mother's voice that made Olga glance in surprise from her face up to where the picture hung receiving the full benefit of light from the large side windows.

"He looks very handsome there," says Ginia, as their three pairs of eyes rest on the picture, "very—very—"

"Determined," says Olga, settling Ginia's doubts as to what idea the firmly compressed lips conveyed.

"I wonder if he will think you much changed," says Ginia, bringing her critical eyes back to the stately

form and worn face of the mother. "I suppose you haven't sent over a series of photos to him, have you?"

"No, not one!"

The girl's suggestion seemed to startle Mrs. Stanhope. Would she not strike Eustis in the light of a disagreeable surprise?

"I wonder if he will find his mother much changed?" she said, almost anxiously. "My boy! who left me in caps and roundabouts and comes back to me the possessor of a vote and a—"

"Mustache let us hope," says Virginia, who had a precocious appreciation of such aids to manly beauty. "I hope he has. It won't be like having a real man at the head of the house, you know, unless his voice is deep and strong and comes to you from under a mustache that he's always twisting. I'm quite sure I shall be dreadfully afraid of him."

Mrs. Stanhope laughed indulgently, but called Ginia a "silly, silly child." Olga never ventured into the realms of badinage or repartee with the mistress of Stanhope. Perhaps it would not have been so well received. She felt quite sure she had no inclination to experiment that way.

"Olga, child, bring me the hand glass off my bureau. I am afraid something is wrong with my eyes. I have read Eustis's letter three times and a round floating spot seems to follow the lines."

Olga looked at her with keen anxiety. There was

undeniably a filmy look in Mrs. Stanhope's usually clear gray eyes! She was soon back with the hand mirror. Perhaps, after all, the film came from unshed tears of joy! Perhaps the glass was a little ruse to relieve the mother's pardonable anxiety on the score of her own looks.

"I'm sure he will think his mother's face the handsomest he ever saw. You could not change to him," she said, with her slow sweet smile, as she held the glass in front of the faded face.

"Nonsense, child! I never knew you flatter before. Don't try your 'prentice hand on me."

The words were a trifle harsh, quite harsh enough to send Olga back to the table-cloth she was darning with a bright blush on her cheeks. There was a mighty capacity for loving infolded in that girlish breast that had as yet found no outlet, for while the difference made between herself and Virginia was so slight as to be impalpable to ordinary powers of observation, Olga was quite sure that she had never gotten so close to Mrs. Stanhope's heart as Virginia had.

"But then, Ginia is so pretty that her very sauciness is lovable," Olga argued generously, "and she only took me because the little thing fretted so to have me. After all, if Ginia had not loved me so, I never would have had this dear peaceful home."

"What do men want of votes, anyhow?" Virginia

asked presently, crossing her small white hands over the pile of crimson crochet work that was rapidly assuming the shape and size of a buggy afghan, destined for the use of the heir concerning whose coming every body at the Hall was more or less exercised. "And what will he do with it, now that he has it?"

The atmosphere which Ginia had breathed all her life was scarcely favorable to the growth of any vivid interest in the large questions of the day.

"What does he want of a vote? To help get things into a worse snarl than ever, I suppose, child," Mrs. Stanhope says, finding jests easy and ready on this light-hearted morning, and giving an answer displaying a truer perception of political ethics than one would have expected from an advanced recluse of the unpolitical sex.

"By-the-way, girls, there is a message about you in my son's letter, that you may as well have the benefit of." She resumed her glasses, took up the letter, turned it about once or twice, took her glasses off, wiped them carefully, found the place and read:

"I hope the children of whom you have spoken so often, may have proved themselves real sources of comfort to you. I am quite prepared to take them into my affections, if they have served to brighten the lonely lot of my dear mother while she has been waiting for me to come home."

"That is kindly said," says Olga, starting the needle

she had held suspended in mid air, as she listened, upon a fresh journey across a threadbare spot.

While Ginia asked, with a click in her voice that sounded a trifle resentful:—

"Do you suppose he expects to find us two quite little girls? Why Olga is seventeen and I am but very little younger. Almost young ladies."

Mrs. Stanhope looked at the speaker with vague surprise stealing into her own face:

"To be sure," she said, "to be sure! How time does fly! Such a little while since I brought you home the merest mites of girls, and, here you are, as you say, almost young ladies."

"It's delightful to think so, too!" Ginia flung the bright afghan on the floor and kneeling on the hassock at Mrs. Stanhope's feet, took the delicate withered hand of her benefactress between her own in a caressing fashion.

"You're not sorry you took us out of that dreadful asylum, are you, Aunty Stanhope? We haven't been much of a bother to you, have we, Ollie and I?" Olga looked at the pretty tableau which Ginia with her sweet pleading up-turned face made, kneeling there clasping their friend's hands in hers, with no envy, only a little heart-ache, because she had never yet come into such loving juxtaposition, nor ventured on the sweet familiarity that seemed to bring those two so much nearer together than she might ever hope to come.

Mrs. Stanhope freed her right hand and placed it gently on the kneeling girl's bright rippling hair:

"No, child, no, I've never regretted taking you out of the asylum. I must say that you and Olga have both done me good. You have been good children, and I have never been quite the selfish recluse I was, since I brought you here. I think we have done each other good." Her hand rested upon the girl's head as in benediction. Esau's wail swelled in the heart of the darker child, sitting there enduring her heart hunger with never a sign of its biting keenness. "Hast thou but one blessing! Bless me, even me, also."

Mrs. Stanhope turned toward her, as Ginia rose from the kneeling position she had assumed.

"Olga, child, do take these glasses and wash them with soap and water. Then if I can not see better, I shall be sure the trouble is in my eyes."

Olga took the glasses and disappeared with them.

Ginia settled herself more comfortably on the hassock and continued in that advisory fashion she was given to, and Mrs. Stanhope was indulgent toward.

"There's nothing in the world the matter with your eyes, Aunty Stanhope. You've been reading those horrid papers by lamp-light. You ought to let Ollie do it. Ollie reads beautifully."

"Yes! I have been a little reckless. But no one can assist me. I want to have Eustis's business in clear

shape when he takes hold of it. Some of those law papers are not easily deciphered."

"Then let Ollie attend to it for you."

Virginia was quite in the habit of suggesting Olga's name when any difficulty arose. She had yet, in her own experience, to meet with any obstacle that Olga could not successfully cope with. Her own reliance on her first friend did not decrease with time. She was loyally in love with her protector of other days and unselfishly proud of her.

"Don't you think Ollie does read beautifully?" she asked persistently.

"Yes, quite well. I am afraid you are letting her outstrip you, Ginia."

"Let her! why how could I prevent her if I wanted to? She's smarter and older and more in earnest and worth more than I am every way. Ollie's just perfect! She's worth a dozen such as I."

"Nonsense! Don't let me ever hear you talk so foolishly again, Ginia. I am glad to see that Olga has made good use of the opportunities afforded her. A good plain education may prove invaluable to her some of these days."

Mrs. Stanhope's tones were severe. She could not tell Ginia that she had looked for more from her than from Olga, because of the latter's tainted extraction. She could not tell her that the possessor of pure Caucasian blood should be the intellectual superior of one

less fortunate." Indeed, she quite prided herself on the rigid performance of her impartial duty to both orphans. In all save musical instruction, against which Olga herself had protested on the score of lack of talent, the two girls had received the same instruction at the hands of Miss Denton, who had solicited this increase to her very meager income. She had been a visiting governess to Stanhope Hall now for all the years that had elapsed since Ginia first discovered her toilsomely climbing the approach to the house in her rusty-topped buggy. Mrs. Stanhope looked forward definitely to the time when Olga would be thrown on her own resources, and purposely sought to fortify her for that hour by instilling into her a spirit of self-reliance, and by making her mistress of as mnch practical information as could well be contained by one small head. She thought of all these things now, as she lay back against the cushions of her chair with closed eyes. Darting arrows of pain seemed to shoot through her eyeballs. For many nights past she had been poring over illegible papers, by the light of an unshaded kerosene lamp, and nature was avenging herself. She pressed her hands over the hot aching balls. Ginia passed from the hassock to the back of the chair and laid a light cool hand over Mrs. Stanhope's closed eyes.

"Ah! that is pleasant! The darkness is a relief."

Presently the girl said somewhat inconsequently:—

"Of course you are going to do something very special when Eus—your son—Mr. Eustis gets here. Something like the English lords and ladies do when the heir comes of age. I heard Miss Denton tell you people would expect something neighborly of you, or they might overlook him. I wonder what Ollie and I ought to call him!"

"Mr. Stanhope, of course," said Olga, coming back just then with the glasses and settling Ginia's difficulty with her usual prompt decisiveness. "Try them now, please," to Mrs. Stanhope, "they shine like crystal."

Mrs. Stanhope put them on, glanced eagerly around at the familiar objects, then sighed heavily as she said: "I am seriously alarmed. The trouble must be in my eyes. My father lost his eye-sight very suddenly," she passed her hand quickly backward and forward across her eyes.

Olga gave one startled look at her, then glided from window to window until she had reduced the glare to a pleasing obscurity.

"Please don't go to imagining things," she said timidly, "indeed, indeed, you only need to rest your eyes."

Ginia, still leaning over the back of the chair added placidly:—

"Your eyes are lovely, if you only wouldn't put them out of nights over musty papers. You must save

yourself for that great party you are going to give Mr. Eustis when he gets here. You will be so proud of him, I expect, that you will want the whole country-side to see him at once."

Mrs. Stanhope fell into the trap set for her.

"I am afraid something of the sort will be expected from me, but I dread it. It was a nuisance to give a party in slave-times, and of course it was easy then by comparison with now. Every house in the neighborhood was expected to give one entertainment a year. Dear, dear, how things have changed since then."

But Ginia's special talent was in suggestion :—

"Why Ollie and Miss Denton and I can take all the bother off you, can't we, Ollie?"

"By the way, Olga," Mrs. Stanhope said, "would you mind riding over this afternoon and telling Miss Denton I should like to have her spend to-morrow with me? Now that you girls have holiday we see so little of her. Tell her I should like her to come early and stay late. I have much to talk with her about. You can tell her about my letter."

"I should love to walk over. It is so cool and pleasant in the woods. Is Ginia to go with me?"

"I believe," said Mrs. Stanhope, again pressing her hand to her closed eyes, "I do not care to have you both go. I want Virginia to write some notes for me this afternoon."

Olga took herself severely to task for the jealous

pang that shot through her, at this preference of Ginia over herself as amanuensis, but none of her pique escaped through eye or voice, and when, a little while later, she plunged into the cool and fragrant depths of the woods that lay between Stanhope Hall and the plantation where Miss Denton had reigned as nominal mistress for many years, all bitterness passed out of her gentle soul and was forgotten.

The "cross-cut" which she had chosen, by preference, over the hot and dusty public road where the ox-wagons toiled laboriously town-ward, high piled with cumbersome bales of cotton, or homeward, more lightly laden with plantation "supplies;" where an occasional lazy mule bestridden by a sleepily indifferent rider shuffled the dust up in little choking clouds; was cool and fragrant and clean, and the birds in the branches overhead sang such tuneful fearless melodies, there, where there was none to make them afraid, that it was quite as if she were having a promenade concert all to herself.

She took off her sun-bonnet and swinging it by its two long strings walked on blithely, in acute harmony with her pleasant surroundings. It was a trifle lonely, but she had never yet met any thing more alarming in those woods than a timid rabbit scudding before her approach with upraised tail and back laid ears, or a nimble frisky woodpecker who would attain a safe altitude above her in the thick branches, then saucily question

her right of way with bright eyes, or a—at this point in her meditations Olga shied! shied very much as a pony might have done under similar circumstances. There, seated on a fallen tree was a woman! Olga was at a loss, at first, to determine what manner of woman it was who had invaded the privacy of what she had come to regard as her own exclusive property, because this pathway, that she so delighted in, was regarded as gloomy and lonely by the more mercurial Ginia, and no one else, unless the "hands" on the way to Sunday meeting, ever trespassed. No one, at least, before this Unknown had found it and apparently meant to enjoy it.

Leaning back against the up-torn root of a fallen tree, the interloper had fallen into a sound sleep. Olga's first Levitish impulse was to pass by as quickly and noiselessly as possible, on the other side, but the good Samaritan in her prevailed, and her second was to discover if this stranger was sick or in distress of any sort.

She came nearer and shook the woman lightly by the arm, then, as the wayfarer opened her eyes and stared stupidly about, she asked:—

"Have you lost your way? What are you doing here in these woods all by yourself? Have you come from far?"

Olga's last question was elicited by the fact that a flabby hand-bag fell to the ground as the woman rose

to a standing position and stretched her arms deliberately as she yawned audibly.

"I believe I did fall asleep," she said, bringing the words out at the end of her protracted yawn. "No, I ain't lost. It would be right hard to lose me any wheres about here. I ain't been here though, for a long time. I'm powerful tired and jus' held up for a little restin' spell. I'm on my way to see a Miss Denton that used to live on the old Rodman place, just t'other side of them woods."

"She lives there yet," Olga said.

"Then I'm all right. I remembered this cross-cut and left the road to take it. Don't seem like a twig even is changed since I walked here the last time. I got off a boat at town this mornin'," she added explanatorily, as she stooped to recover the flabby hand-bag.

She was dressed in black, with a shabby effort at gentility, principally displayed in the keeping of a very rusty crape veil drawn over her face, but the ungloved hand that was stretched out after the fallen bag, was coarse and large, and not that of a white woman!

She is a mulatto, looking for a place as house servant, was Olga's mental decision; then aloud——

"I am on my way to see Miss Denton now. If you are not quite sure of your way, perhaps you would like to walk on with me?"

The girl's voice took on that quiet tone of patronage that the Caucasian involuntarily assumes toward those of less pure extraction. This woman was, no doubt, much her senior in years, but she was evidently her inferior in every other respect. If the stranger noticed the faint flavor of hauteur she did not resent it.

"Much 'bliged to you. You seem to be a real sweet 'commodatin' young lady. I don't much think I couldn't find my way alone, for things do seem to change mighty slow about here, but as I've had just enough of my own company I'll take you at your word."

"Are you going to work for Miss Denton?" asked Olga, by way of making talk as they moved on side by side.

The woman laughed a trifle scornfully as she answered:

"Maybe I am, an' maybe I ain't. One thing is sure. I ain't a-goin' to be knocked about the world like a stray dog no longer."

As Olga had no advice to give on this subject and was at a loss for any other to introduce, they lapsed into silence which lasted until they reached the yard gate on the Rodman place, and caught sight of Miss Denton's genial face.

"Bless goodness, the old woman ain't changed no more than the trees back yonder in the woods," said the stranger, lifting the gate latch with the familiarity

of long acquaintanceship, and leading the way up the walk.

Olga followed in her wake quite satisfied that whoever the stranger might be, she was in no need of patronage from herself.

CHAPTER X.

MISS DENTON RENEWS AN ACQUAINTANCE.

MISS DENTON, rocking, knitting, reading and fanning simultaneously, in the big broad-armed splint-bottomed chair on her front gallery, conveyed an idea of very unseasonable activity on that hot afternoon; but having nothing more important than her own comfort to exercise her mental ingenuity upon during the long summer holidays, she quite prided herself upon an invention, which, to use her own expression, enabled her to combine business with pleasure, with highly gratifying results.

By a simple mechanical contrivance on the back of her chair, she kept two huge palmetto fans in perpetual motion at the small expenditure of enough vital force to keep the big rocker, also, in perpetual motion. Thus, with her open book secured upon one of the broad flat arms of the chair she was enabled to pursue that labyrinth in red wool, which had its beginning in remote by-gone ages and whose completion no one ever looked forward to beholding. She gave the impression of an animated bit of mechanism herself, as Olga and the shabby woman advanced toward her through the

avenue of crape myrtles that pointed the straight and narrow way from Miss Denton's front gate to her front steps. As the rocker became conscious of her visitors, her shining needles executed a surprised staccato movement, and then fell upon the mystery in wool that lay in a hot and fiery heap on her lap. She was always glad to see Olga, always had a smile for her, but the smile with which she greeted her this time was short-lived and faded entirely as she turned a coldly scrutinizing glance on the girl's companion.

"Did you want to see me?" she asked, decidedly ungraciously.

"Yes'm, but I ain't in no sort of a hurry. Young missey is, I reckon. She was saying as we come along that she must hurry or it would be gettin' dark in the woods before she got home. I can wait. Just take your own time, both of you."

The words and tones were evidently meant to be propitiatory. The shabby stranger seated herself humbly enough on the top-step, and calmly divesting herself of her hat and veil revealed a worn thin face, dark, sallow and sensual, only relieved from positive ugliness by a pair of lustrous dark eyes.

Miss Denton's ungraciousness did not diminish as the removal of her visitor's veil confirmed her suspicion that she was one of those "half-and-halfs," as she scornfully called all mulattoes, who "weren't any one thing in particular and belonged nowhere especially." She

drew Olga inside the house to hear her message, leaving her self-invited visitor to bide her time in patience.

"What I especially wanted to talk with you about," said Olga, after her message was delivered, and her soft eyes were full of troubled anxiety, "was Mrs. Stanhope's eyes. I can't tell you how uneasy I am about them. I think something must have been wrong with them longer than she has acknowledged even to herself, but now, oh! I can see that something is terribly wrong. What if she should go blind?"

Miss Denton did not "pooh-pooh" her fears as Olga had hoped she would. On the contrary, she said very gravely, "You make me quite uneasy. Blindness runs in the Eustis family. You know she was a Miss Eustis. Her father lost his eyesight very suddenly, I am told, from reading a newspaper in a skiff with the glare of the sunshine and water dazzling him, and she has told me of a sister who lost her eyesight completely. I shall certainly be over to-morrow. Now, dear, I want you to hurry home. It will be getting quite dark in the woods. By the way, who is that woman you brought with you?"

"I can't say that I did exactly bring her," said Olga, looking through the window to where the woman was gazing placidly about her, more with the air of one renewing acquaintance than as a stranger investigating unfamiliar surroundings. Then Olga told how they had come together, asking in conclusion:

"Is she a white woman badly sun-burned? I don't think I ever saw just such a color."

"On the contrary, she is a colored woman badly bleached. Sickly, I suppose. Wants to work about the house. They all do. She'll tell me presently how many ladies she has sewed for, and will try to convince me that my life will be valueless without her assistance in future. I know them. She looks sickly, poor wretch."

"And untidy too," says Olga, looking with disapproval at the frowzy woman on the steps. Then she kissed Miss Denton with the rapturous effusion that girls always instill into those flavorless caresses, and went away leaving the little old lady at liberty to catechise the stranger within her gates with as much asperity as she chose to exercise.

Miss Denton resumed her seat in the big rocker, found the place in her book, crossed her needles in first position, and, having set the complicated machinery of rockers, feet, fan and needles once more in brisk motion, said crisply:

"Well! what can I do for you? You are looking for work, I suppose. You don't look very strong."

The words were not particularly kind, but perhaps this was the nearest approach to sympathy the shabby woman had received for a long time. Her large eyes grew suddenly wet with unshed tears, and she clasped her ungloved hands nervously together, as she answered:

"No'm, I ain't none too strong, and I've had a mighty hard time of it since I seen you last time. You don't remember me, do you, Miss Denton?"

Miss Denton peered at her scrutinizingly over her glasses for a second, then answered indifferently:

"No! I can't say that I do. What is your name?"

"Missis Banks! Missis Rosa Banks."

The shabby woman laid decided emphasis on the prefix "Mrs.," probably as a sort of guarantee of respectability, or perhaps because the possession of a surname with a prefix to it was still a novelty to her race.

"Mrs. Banks!" Miss Denton repeated with a little ironical snap in her voice, "never heard that name in my life. Of course I can't recall what I never knew."

"Oh! that weren't my entitle when I lived in these parts. You used to know me as Rose."

"Rose what?"

"Rose nothin'. I was jus' Rose, and wasn't nothin' else. I cooked and cleaned house for you, don't you remember, for two months, just about the time the Yankees took Natchez? Don't you remember Rose, Miss Denton? Nothin' 't all about her?"

Miss Denton looked again at the worn face before her. It was lighted up now with an eager demand for recognition. She said slowly, as if searching the chambers of memory for missing links:

"I do remember once—during the war—getting up one morning and finding myself without a servant—

and—going down to the corral—under the hill—where all the freed people who ran to the Yankees were herded—to see if I could hire a girl."

"Yes'm," Mrs. Banks flung in encouragingly.

"And," Miss Denton resumed slowly, as if groping her way toward the light, "I do remember, that a young girl hired to me very willingly, and made me a very good servant while she staid, which wasn't for very long."

"No'm! I was a mighty fool in my young days," says Mrs. Banks with humble self-abasement.

"And I think she called herself Rose, but—she—was quite ——"

"Purty, you was goin' to say. I'm that ve'y same Rose, Miss Denton, but I've had a heap uv hard knocks sence then. Yes'm, I is that. I've seen a sight o' trouble."

"But you call yourself Mrs. Banks now?"

"Yes'm, after I went away from you I married a good fur nothin' triflin' yaller barber called Banks, an' he drug an' he drug me roun' from post to pillar, till I los' my health an' my pluck an' all the go that ever was in me. He sorter settled down finally in Cleveland, and thar's where he died, which was the only good turn he ever done me."

"But—" Miss Denton hesitated. True, the woman before her had once been a slave, nothing but a chattel. Had never been reared to value the moralities or even

the decencies of life. But perhaps with freedom had come some sort of respect for the observances of virtue, and, therefore, the question that trembled on her lips might give offense. Nevertheless, as she had her own private reasons for diving to the bottom of this woman's history, and very powerful reasons they were, she finally said:

"But—Rose—when you were with me you were about to— What has become of your child?"

The complicated machinery of which Miss Denton was an integral portion came to a dead stop as she waited for the woman's answer.

"Poor little brat, she's better off than I ever could 'a' made her."

"Dead?" the lady asked.

"No'm. At least not as I knows on, but Banks, he was that mean and hateful to her, always abusin' of her and callin' her my 'white brat,' that I ups one day and takes her to a orphan 'sylum in Cleveland, whar one color is as good as another, an' I jus' slips her inside the door yard, when there weren't nobody a-lookin', an' left her there a cryin' for her mammy. But her mammy done it for her good, and I ain't never been sorry for it, no, not oncet. I done the best I knowed how."

"And you've never seen her since?"

"Never sence that blessed minute when I peeped from behind a tree box on t'other side of the street and saw

some chillun standin' roun' my poor little girl. And then I went back and told Banks he might take his spite out on me, but thank God he couldn't peck at my child no more. She wur beyond harm's reach and I could stand all the rest."

Her eyes were hard and dry as she told this story of domestic infelicity quite as if it concerned any body rather than herself.

"How long ago was that?" asks the catechist in the chair.

"That! let me see! That mus' 'a' ben about twelve years ago. My gal, if she's livin' now, mus' be about seventeen year old."

"And you staid in Cleveland all that time without trying to see her?"

"Oh! no'm, I didn't do no such of a thing. I ain't that hard. Banks, he died, or leastways he was drowndid one Sunday, when he was on a spree, just about two months after I put my chile at the 'sylum, and then I thinks, now I'll have my child back in peace. Then I thinks, no, I won't neither. They'll teach her something worth knowin' where you've put her and she'll have a better chance than you can ever give her, so you better just let her alone. An' as I knowed it would be more than I could hold myself to, if I staid near her, where my heart might get the better of my head and make me claim her, I jist packed up my duds an' left. And so I've just ben a-driftin' and driftin',

changin' places and changin' mistresses, fust for one cause and then for another, till I found myself back at Natchez a chamber-maiding on a steamboat; an' when the boat touched at the wharf, old times come over me too strong an' I 'lowed I'd make one more change, I'd hire out to you, ef you was alive yet an' would take me, (I remember you was a good mistress, Miss Denton), and so soon as I can save up a little money, I'll light out oncet more and get across the river down to whar I left my poor ole mammy a-grievin' for me. Maybe, she's dead and gone long ago. I hope she ain't. I'd like to stop with her the balance of my days. I'm gettin' feeble an' no 'count: the time's comin' when nobody won't hire me, 'cause they won't see their money's worth in me. But mammy 'll be glad to see me. She'll take me in ef she's above groun'. I can count on mammy. I never knowed until I had to give my own girl up what I'd made my poor ole mammy suffer, but she'll forgive me. I know my girl couldn't come to me asking furgiveness and not getting it. I can count on mammy."

"Who is your mother, Rose, and where does she live?"

"Ef she's livin' at all she's down on the old place over in the Louisiany bottoms. Down at Bendemma. Her name's Dora."

"Mr. Trowbridge's old housekeeper?"

"She used to be."

"And you knew Mr. Trowbridge?"

"I used to belong to him," said the woman in the weary monotone in which all her utterances were conveyed.

Miss Denton leaned back in silence.

"Is any thing happened to Mr. Waring?" the woman on the steps asked presently, with only a modicum of interest in her voice. A dull curiosity stirred her dulled senses, nothing more.

"No," said Miss Denton, very slowly, "at least not lately." Then the big rocker was put slowly in motion again. The big fans swayed with it, but the book was closed and the needles were idle. Presently the woman in the chair motioned to the woman on the steps to come nearer.

Rose obeyed the gesture. Miss Denton looked up at her pleadingly.

"Rose! will you tell me the name of your child's father? I do not ask from idle curiosity. Will you tell me?"

"No'm. I'll never do that. There ain't no use askin'."

"But your child? For her sake? For—for every body's sake!"

"She's safe. She's where it won't be counted ag'inst her that she didn't have the choosin' of her own mammy."

"Do you feel sure that you will never want to reclaim her?"

"Oh! no'm, I can't say that. I can't say I'll never want her back. But I can say, that though I've wanted her back many and many a time already so bad that it seemed like my heart would break if I couldn't put my arms roun' the sweet thing just for oncet, if she was standin' before me now, looking well and happy and purty, (fur ef she's growed up at all she's bound to 'a' growed up purty), I wouldn't let on I was her mammy, an' sp'ile her chances of gettin' on in the worl', not if it killed me to keep silent! Indeed, ma'am, I wouldn't. But I ain't likely to be tempted in no such fashion sence I've put so many miles betwix' us. It's hard lines though, Miss Denton, mighty hard. But ef I could go back to my ole mammy with a little money in my pocket, her and me'll weather it through together. If mammy's livin' yet, she'll make me welcome. Mammys ain't like no other sort of folks, you know, they can't forgit, and stop carin' fur their own. You'll give me a chance to earn the money, won't you, miss?"

Miss Denton rocked in a meditative, halting fashion for a few more silent moments. The sun had long since sunk behind the crape myrtles, and the gloom of early night-fall was shutting the house in from the world outside the myrtles. The lowing of the cows as they defiled past the gate, going back to pasture after giving their all, impartially to calf and piggin, fell pleasantly on the quiet air. The last plowman on the last mule had passed out of sight with a whistled tune and clank-

ing trace-chains; the out-look was lonely and somber. The air was full of low flying bull-bats darting in every direction in pursuit of insects; the road was already wrapped in the shadows of night.

The woman who had "drifted and drifted" causelessly and aimlessly, until she had almost drifted round the eddy to her starting point in life, stood there docile and patient, waiting for the decision that should give her another temporary home or send her adrift once more, friendless and forlorn. Even her anxieties partook of a stolid patience.

"Rose," said Miss Denton finally, in a tone of decision, "if you think you will be willing to be guided by me in all things, all things mind you, I would be willing to give you a trial, so that you may earn the money to take you home. You know I never was a hard employer, but I must have obedience from those I employ."

"I don't think you an' me is like to fall out, Miss Denton. I'm that tired of knockin' about the worl' that seems like I'd be glad to stay jus' for the shelter of your roof an' a kind word. But I don't want to pester you when I gets too sick to work. Then I mus' try to find mammy. She'll forget (if she's alive an' 'bove groun' she will), how I run away with the boys an' left her and daddy all alone; she'll forget how I used to pester the life out of her with my sassy no 'count ways; she'll jus' remember it's Rosetta come back and

she'll make it easy for me 'till the end comes. Oh! I can 'pend on mammy."

And so she staid joyfully and unconditionally.

Miss Denton dismissed her to the kitchen for rest and refreshment, and soon after took herself and her machinery in-doors from the night dews and the low flying bats, which no amount of familiar intercourse with, could render less obnoxious.

That night, as she stood meditatively before her looking glass abstractedly pinning the gray wisp of hair on either temple into a compact little ball, thinking abstractedly of this sudden addition to her domestic cabinet, she settled the matter with her conscience by declaring it was the only safe thing to do:

"There are tremendous possibilities of woe to others locked up in that ignorant breast, and it is better to have her in my sight than any where else."

CHAPTER XI.

THE BLOW DESCENDS.

MRS. STANHOPE sat in darkness! Not that beneficent absence of light that comes with the soothing refreshment of shade after garish sunlight! Not the darkness of night, the somber-liveried herald of sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care! Not a darkness that simply shut out from her the old Hall with its grassy terraces and its pink and white azaleas, together with the pitying glances that could dwell now upon her stricken face without fear of reproach or detection! Not a darkness that carried its own antidote in the sure promise of returning light! But in a darkness that had fallen suddenly, terribly, finally upon her with an awful permanence. Fallen when the sun was shining its brightest and all nature wearing her most radiant smiles for the home-coming of the heir! Fallen upon her like a pall, wrapping body and soul about in a gloom that was as hopeless as it was profound. All her wail was for Eustis! As for herself she had so long cultivated the Spartan virtues of fortitude and endurance that no earthly ill had power now to extract one selfish moan from her.

But Eustis! Her boy! To what was he coming home? How could he endure this blind companionship, this unseeing intercourse? What meaning would home hold for him? It was easy enough to impose on the imperious mistress of Stanhope Hall in those first days of her helplessness, before the sense of hearing had been drilled to do double duty. But she did not know that she was never alone. It was Olga's self-appointed task to hover noiselessly about her, removing every impediment from her path to spare her as much as possible of the keen mortification she felt over her own awkwardness in getting about the old familiar rooms. The rooms were darkened unnecessarily now, for it had been weeks since the physicians had declared Mrs. Stanhope's case of blindness a hopeless one, and she had taken up the burden that had been borne by more than one of her family before with pathetic dignity. Eustis had been written to! Written to by the doctor who had been very explicit on the point of the permanence of his mother's blindness. So he was not coming home unprepared. This was the day on which he was expected!

Olga stood by the library window with a fast beating heart, looking down the road by which he must approach. She was almost afraid to breathe comfortably lest she should be ordered out of the beloved presence.

Mrs. Stanhope sighed heavily, and passed her hand

over the motionless lids of her eyes with the impatient gesture now so pathetically familiar to them all. "If Eustis takes it rebelliously it will kill me," she cried aloud in her agony, then burst into sobs so passionate and unrestrained that Olga wept for sympathy. It would be treachery to conceal her presence any longer; dropping on her knees by the blind woman's side she dared for the first time in all these years, to clasp caressing arms about Mrs. Stanhope's waist, as she said, "Dear Mrs. Stanhope! dear more than mother, do not fear but that you will be dearer than ever to him. Do him justice! If any affliction had overtaken him, would you love him less or more?"

"Hush, child! You mean well, but you talk ignorantly. Eustis is young and keenly alive to all the brightest possibilities of life. Tumultuous rebellion flows in his every vein. He is a man—all men rebel at confinement. He is a Stanhope—they all adore physical perfection! An infirmity is to them a disgrace—an affliction, a crime. Eustis's sense of duty may keep him by my side for a little while, but it can not last, it can not last, child." She laid her hand heavily on the kneeling girl's shoulder. "If you really feel grateful to me for the past, show it now! Be all that you can be to the house Eustis is to live in. See that personal discomfort and disorder in his home do not disgust him and hasten the inevitable hour of his leaving me. I can trust you to do this, Olga, can I not?"

"Indeed, indeed you can! It makes me so happy to have you think of me as a helper in any thing."

"Ginia is lively and amusing and her music may give my son pleasure in the dull long evenings. She too must help to make his darkened home bearable. My poor boy, what a home-coming?"

Olga did not fail to recognize that here too the line was sharply drawn between Ginia and herself. It was an impalpable putting of herself on a lower plane always, always!

"I shall go to my room and lie down," Mrs. Stanhope continued. "Perhaps if I could rest, I could meet my poor boy more calmly. Tell him where to find me, child. No, don't come with me. Don't you suppose I know the way to the room I've slept in for forty years?" There was a ring of impatient misery in the blind woman's voice, as she turned from Olga's hand, that had touched her sleeve gently, and walked slowly from the room.

Even as she spoke, the carriage that had been sent into town to meet Eustis was toiling up the hill that hid the old Hall from the public road and from the eyes of the young man, who leaned forward from the back seat, eagerly renewing acquaintance with the old familiar landscape.

"Squires, I believe I would rather walk through the grounds," he said, calling a halt and opening the carriage door for himself; he turned his back upon the

vehicle and started forward with the long swinging stride of an accomplished pedestrian. He struck into a bridle-path that he had been familiar with from his earliest childhood and the carriage drove rapidly forward by the road.

Once within the shelter of the trees where he and the denizens of the woods used to be on such intimate terms of enmity, Eustis's stride subsided into a slow walk: it was as if he went forward reluctantly to meet the shadows that waited for him in the old house. He had looked forward to this home-coming with all the exuberant anticipation of a nature prone to extract the latent sweetness from every passing opportunity. He had taken boyish pleasure in anticipating his mother's satisfaction in the erect military carriage that had superseded the indolent slouch of his early youth. He had plotted and planned more than half a dozen grotesque disguises in which he purposed presenting himself before her, to test the boasted insight of mother-love. And now he was come home to gloom and bereavement, with the imperative demand laid upon him that he should be "calm and cheerful" in her presence. This last Stanhope of the name was phenomenal in no respect. He was well grown and well developed, with a fine head set firmly on broad shoulders, with clear, sensible eyes and a square jaw that promised well for him should he ever get thoroughly in earnest about any thing.

It seemed a cruel and inscrutable dispensation that shut his mother away from him, just as he had hoped to compensate her in some measure for all the sacrifices she had made for his sake, all the loneliness she had endured so patiently! It had been easy enough for him to write a comforting letter to her, but here he was about to be brought face to face with the awful reality and he was not at all sure of his own strength.

This is why he preferred sauntering slowly toward the house rather than be driven into his mother's presence unprepared. This is why, seating himself on a grass-grown stump, in the shadow of the trees, he drew his hat far down over his face and gave himself up entirely to his fierce grief for the first and last time since it had come upon him. It seemed to him he had been sitting there long enough to live over again in memory all of his old life, with its lights and shadows, its pains and pleasures all reflected in the same never-fading light of mother-love, when a soft rustling near him made him raise his head and push back from his eyes the hat he had drawn low down over his moody brows. It was scarcely louder than the rustling scamper of a brown rabbit, which, he doubted not it was until, as he raised his bowed head, a pretty bit of coloring caught his artist eye. There, flushing and paling before him, her hands clasped together and her soft eyes scanning him with a womanly pity beyond her years, stood Olga, making with her dark blue dress

and white apron, her straw hat with its little red pom-pon, her sweet, serious face and earnest eyes a pleasing surprise in the shadowy woods:

"And this is——?" he asked, rising courteously and looking down upon her from what seemed to her a tremendous height.

"Olga, one of the orphans."

"Ah! yes."

Her voice trembled perceptibly as she went on hurriedly. "I came to meet you on purpose, Mr. Stanhope. It is all very dreadful, oh! so absolutely dreadful, but please try to make her think you don't mind; at least, not very much. I have heard her say, poor dear, and she said it with such awful sobs, that 'if you took it rebelliously it would kill her,' and I thought, maybe, if you knew just how she felt beforehand it might help you to act for the best. That is why I came to meet you."

"It was well thought of, little Olga."

Olga's cheeks flushed redly under the broad brim of her hat. She had yet something to say. She could dare much for those she loved.

"And, perhaps, if you would go right straight to her, instead of trying to prepare yourself beforehand, it would come easier. I think there are some things we can not prepare for, don't you, sir?"

"Why what a wise little counselor it is!" said Eustis, looking down at her sideways, scarcely knowing

whether to be amused or astonished at the grave decision of manner displayed by this mere slip of a girl. She quietly placed herself at his side as they moved on toward the house and said, with a shy upward glance:

"Thank you for letting me say these things." Then with sudden inconsequence, "You are taller than we expected you to be," she said, measuring him swiftly with an eye that took in the low broad-brimmed hat with its broad black band, the short-cropped hair, that left a section of sun-burned neck bare between it and the tall shirt-collar, and dropped finally on a pair of well polished shoes.

"Who are 'we'?" Eustis asked, smiling into her upturned face.

"Virginia and I. We have talked about you a great deal, and drawn a great many pictures of you to amuse ourselves," she answered, with a matter-of-fact simplicity that precluded all idea of coquetry or boldness.

"And where is Virginia now?"

"I left her putting flowers into the vases in your room. You will like Virginia, she is so bright and pretty, and plays very nicely. Mrs. Stanhope says you love music very much."

"And how about your music?"

"I don't play at all. I had no talent. Virginia has a great deal. Does the place look very natural to you, Mr. Stanhope?"

Thus, perhaps designedly, Olga talked steadily on, until they stood together before his mother's closed door. She faced him there with her hand upon the knob. Tears stood in her eyes.

"Please be brave," she said, "for her dear sake."

"Trust me, child!" He laid his hand on her head for a second, and then passed by her into the darkened presence of his mother, who heard his foot-fall, and stood with eager arms outstretched toward him! Statuesque in her beauty! Sublime in her resignation!

And Eustis, gathering her close in his embrace, spoke brave cheerful words to her, while she passed her trembling hands over every feature of his face, learning to live by faith rather than by sight.

Which is the beginning of wisdom.

CHAPTER XII.

DISCORDANT NOTES.

HAVING done all that she could to guard against any disturbing display of emotion on Eustis's part by forewarning him of probable consequences, Olga breathed a sigh of relief as she closed the door behind him, hung her hat on the rack in the hall, and went to find Ginia to discuss the event of the day! The coming of Eustis!

They had both felt a full and natural share of curiosity concerning this stranger, who was henceforth to be a portion of their daily experience, and she was anxious to give Ginia the benefit of her own first impressions. She found her in the room they shared in common. At the moment of Olga's entrance the younger girl was industriously employed dusting and arranging the books on the center table. She was dressed with rather unusual elaborateness, for Ginia seldom wasted time adorning her person unless there was a distinct understanding that some one besides Mrs. Stanhope and Olga were to be impressed by it. There was a decided flush on her round cheeks, and a

decided pout on her full red lips, and a decided suggestion of huffiness generally about Virginia, as she industriously dusted and banged the books back in their places, in a frenzy of very unusual zeal in the cause of neatness and order.

"He has come, Ginia!" said Olga, closing the door behind her with that regard for noiselessness that was entirely habitual with her.

Virginia stopped dusting the magenta and gold Tennyson in her hand, to ask with a superfluous show of indifference:

"Who has come?"

"Why, Mr. Stanhope, of course."

"Oh!"

Ginia completed the dusting of Tennyson, and laid him on a pile of his confreres, with due regard to artistic selection of a dun-colored neighborhood, to subdue his gold and magenta brilliance.

"And I have seen him," Olga adds, with vivid interest in the subject and in her voice.

"Oh!" said Ginia again. But monosyllables were not her forte, and presently she burst out with, "I knew that some time ago. I must say it looked a little queer to me. I hope it did not to him."

"Queer! What looked queer?" Olga asked, fastening her surprised eyes on Ginia's flushed face.

"Oh! nothing! Only I know if I had gone to meet a strange young gentleman on purpose to walk home

with him, no one would have been quicker than you to call me a 'giddy creature.' I only hope Mr. Stanhope did not call you a giddy creature to himself."

Olga gasped! Very much as she might have done if some one had unexpectedly dashed a tumbler of cold water in her face. Then she sat down rather violently.

"Ginia!"

"Olga!"

There was a world of indignant protest in the one voice, and of spiteful mockery in the other.

"How dare you speak so about my going to meet Mr. Stanhope? I only went—I only meant—" She suddenly stopped, surprised to find herself on the verge of apology to Virginia, for having done what she thought it well to do for their benefactress' sake.

"I only thought—I only meant," says Ginia with a clever reproduction of Olga's intonation, "to say that it was really mean of you, that's all. We might have gone together, but I suppose you preferred giving him the impression, that next to his mother no one cared half as much as you did about his home-coming."

Olga looked at the flushed and angry face before her in quiet indignation. She had some skill and a good deal of experience touching these tempestuous outbursts. The flood-gates of Ginia's wrath once open she was neither choice nor backward in giving expression to her feelings. It would end presently in a shower of tears, followed by a lurid sunburst of hysterical

laughter, during which Ginia would retract all her ugly accusations, or transfer them to herself in propitiatory self-abasement, and an insecure armistice would be entered into between them. Olga had hoped much from time and improved mental conditions, but as yet Virginia was scarcely a degree less unreasonable and turbulent than in the old asylum days.

"Ginia," she said presently, "hush! If there was any room for jealousy in this case, I would say you were jealous now, for you are acting just as you always do, when you fancy Mrs. Stanhope or Miss Denton have shown me the least little preference over you. Now let me say something that may save you a world of trouble and mortification in the days to come. Don't you know that Mrs. Stanhope's son is no more to me or to you than the king of England would be?"

"England hasn't got any king," said Ginia, reaching the stage of her inevitable and hysterical laughter.

But Olga went on unsmilingly: "Mrs. Stanhope was telling me only this morning what duties she expected each of us to perform in order to make things as pleasant and home-like as possible for Mr. Stanhope. You are to keep the flower vases full of fresh flowers, and are to give him music whenever he chooses to call for it. I am to see that his room and his clothes are kept in good order, and to prepare his favorite desserts for dinner. We are to make up to him, as well as two ignorant willing girls can, all that his home misses through

her affliction. That is all. But don't forget, Ginia, that we are nothing but charity girls. I don't say it in any bitterness, for the charity has been full and sweet, but oh ! Ginia, don't go and be foolish now. Perhaps we can repay in this way some little portion of our great debt of gratitude to his mother."

"As far as I am concerned," said Ginia cruelly, "his mother coaxed me to come here. I had never thought of her doing it. I'm sure we've already paid her back."

Olga turned from her in complete discouragement. She was harder to touch than ever she had known before. Slowly unbraiding the shining plaits that had been roughened and blown about in her walk, she proceeded to smooth and braid again the long black hair, that was at once so soft and glossy but lacked the rippling beauty that marked Virginia's hair. The two girls had many physical characteristics in common. The chief distinction lying in the color of their eyes and the expression of their mouths. Both had grown up much prettier than the promise of their early days. Impartial judges found more to admire in the serious sweetness and earnestness of Olga's black eyes and firm thin lips, than in Virginia's laughing, daring brown eyes and fuller, redder lips.

In secret Mrs. Stanhope had puzzled over what seemed so extremely like a freak on the part of nature. By all known physiological laws, the close rippling hair,

thick red lips and unclassic nose which went to make up the rather irregular prettiness of her favorite orphan, should have belonged to Olga.

"Is he handsome, Olga?" Ginia asked presently, in her usual nothing-has-happened voice.

"I don't know."

"Don't know! Oh, what a fib! Didn't you go to meet him, and walked a half mile home with him?"

"Yes, I did to tell him what I had heard his mother say, and to beg him not to let her think it minded much."

"And don't know whether he is handsome or not!"

"He is tall and strong looking, and has big kind eyes, and I like his looks, but I don't know that you will."

"And a mustache?"

"No," Olga laughed. "His face is as smooth as yours or mine."

"Oh! I'm so sorry. I think a long mustache with a man always chewing it, is lovely." Ginia softly patted the fluffy little rings of hair about her forehead and added briskly:

"Mercy! Half-past eleven and I always get a scolding if I don't practice from eleven to twelve. I think I'll go down. I can get a whole hour yet before I'm wanted."

But Olga turned on her pleadingly: "I wouldn't

open the piano to-day, Ginia, if I were you. It might jar on his feelings."

"Jar on his fiddlesticks," Ginia answered flippantly, and waltzing out of the room, she flung a backward glance of defiance at her little monitor. Presently there floated up to Olga, from the library, strains of music so soft and plaintive that however else they might affect the new comer, certainly were not calculated to jar on his feelings.

She sat down upon the side of the low couch that had been her nightly place of rest for five peaceful, happy years and tried to calmly map out for herself the routine of the days that were to come. Poor little Olga, she had been plotting and planning for some sort of defined individual life, as far back as she could remember. She often really envied Virginia's kittenish irresponsibility and indifference to the future, which carried her through the days in a truly scriptural repose concerning what the morrow should bring forth. But then Ginia had never been the recipient of certain vague intimations, that "some of these days she would have herself alone to depend on." She had even talked the matter over calmly with Miss Denton, who always encouraged her desire for ultimate independence. Her eighteenth year was the one tacitly agreed upon by all, for the termination of her life of ease and bounty. Would this trouble of Mrs. Stanhope's alter the future for her? She did not want to seem ungrate-

ful, but she could never take up the life of independent labor she proposed for herself, there, where she had been so much on an equality with them all. She was just wondering how much might happen before her next birth-day! Perhaps she was disquieting herself in vain. So far from feeling any elation at the responsibility Mrs. Stanhope had laid upon her that morning, she felt anxious and nervous. How should she go about keeping his home "bright and unchanged" for Eustis Stanhope, who would of course be perpetually contrasting her ways with the old ways! She hoped he was not one of the capricious and exacting sort. If he should look very much dissatisfied with things, she was quite sure she would be frightened out of her senses, and there was no one to advise with. Olga had never forgotten the early lessons of her asylum life. In every perplexity she turned for council and comfort to Him who has said, 'ask and ye shall receive.' Sinking to her knees she buried her head in the pillows of the lounge and softly asked for help and guidance from above. And while she kneeled there the soft strains of Home, Sweet Home, played with that heart-melting pathos Ginia knew so well how to infuse into her music, floated upward to her.

"I was going to stop," Virginia said in a triumphant whisper, as Olga stood by the piano a little later on, "but he told me to go on." She nodded toward the front gallery, where, with his hands clasped behind

his back, his hat drawn far down in front, a cigar between his teeth, Eustis Stanhope was pacing restlessly to and fro. "He says," Ginia continued in an excited undertone, "that he does not want his coming to interfere with any of our regular habits."

"That was kind of him," said Olga.

The cessation of the music caused Eustis to glance toward them.

"Ah! you are there, little Olga. Come out here, I have a great deal to ask you about my poor mother that I can not bring myself to ask her. I have left her to rest while I smoke. If you do not mind my cigar, we will walk and talk."

With shy reluctance Olga obeyed him, joining him on the veranda. The thorn of Virginia's planting rankled in her tender flesh, but, as he resumed his cigar and walk with a rather curt demand that she should tell him all about it, she entered fully into the history of the great trouble that infolded them all in its black shadow.

Ginia's hands fell among the keys again with discordant vehemence, and, after running a few unmusical scales with hysterical rapidity, she rose, lowered the lid of the piano, and disappeared, to the secret relief of the young man on the gallery.

Later on, Eustis found her seated on the hassock, at his mother's feet, talking to her in a lively strain, and winning smiles for her reward.

She discreetly withdrew at his entrance, and Mrs. Stanhope and her son fully discussed her investment in orphans.

"You seem to have a treasure in the child Olga," said Eustis; "she is a grave, discreet, wise little thing, far beyond her years in point of character, I should imagine."

"Olga is a good girl," said Mrs. Stanhope, with no enthusiasm, "there is no denying it."

(Quite, you know, as if she would have liked very much to deny it, conscience permitting.)

"But I can see," Eustis added, "that the child Virginia has gotten a little nearer to you. You are quite sure she is in no danger of being spoiled for her prettiness?"

"Quite. Ginia is an artless, sweet girl, whom it would be hard to spoil. If I make a difference between the two, trust me it is not causelessly. But I would rather you talked to me about yourself."

And Eustis gratified her by being excessively egotistical for the next hour.

CHAPTER XIII.

EUSTIS'S ANALYSIS.

IT is amazing with what facility human nature adapts itself to conditions, which, when first presented as a possibility of the future, it recoils from in pain, and pronounces "utterly unbearable." As if any thing in God's providence could be utterly unbearable. But the blow descends; and we rally from the first stunning force of it, and gather together our shattered ideals; and reconstruct them to suit the altered conditions of our altered selves; and fall into line once more, a trifle less buoyant of heart, less sure of foot, perhaps, and move on in the march of events, thinking tenderly of our former selves and former ideals as of some dear comrades who have dropped behind, leaving us to press forward with a semblance of the old zeal toward some new goal, when lo! we are suddenly surprised into the consciousness that by divine leadership over unknown ways we have reached broader plains and more dazzling heights than those which we outlined on the crude maps of our own imagination, when picturing to ourselves, in early youth, the manner of resting-place we should finally attain unto!

On the threshold of his manhood Eustis Stanhope was called upon to reconstruct the entire plan for his future. A plan which had been mapped out with that assured confidence in himself and serene blindness to the possibility of any interference on the part of providence, which belongs exclusively to the insolent days of our youth.

In his last school term, when the future of his free days loomed so big and so near, he had quite decided that a European tour, (accompanied by his handsome mother, whose solid mental attainments and keen powers of observation would make her the most delightful of traveling companions), would be the thing to do; and he had looked forward with boyish fervor to thus compensating his mother for the long estrangement, which had necessarily borne more heavily on her than on him. Yet, here he was at home, and freed from his college bonds, with ample leisure and opportunity for realizing the old, old fact, that God rarely ever disposes as man proposes.

Men of one-and-twenty, with the physical proportions of an athlete and the superabundant vitality of healthy young manhood, are not pre-eminently fitted for the post of comforter under affliction, especially when the affliction overshadows themselves so closely that their own need of comfort is urgent and lasting.

That he loved his mother very devotedly, no one could doubt. That existence in the dreary old Hall

with no other companionship than that of an afflicted woman and two crude young girls, who had been reared in almost monastic seclusion, would soon prove intolerable to him, no one could doubt either. That he was in a rebellious frame of mind against the Ordainer of his defeat, he was himself altogether conscious of, and even extracted one flavorless crumb of comfort from the fact that his mother could only partially conceive of his sullen and bitter gloom.

It is curious with what staid propriety the domestic machinery of a household may revolve, while within the soul of each of its inmates all is at dissonance; sweet bells jangled! In fact, life seemed set in a minor key to all at the Hall, excepting Virginia, who, Psyche-like, seemed only just to have discovered the possession of a soul.

Olga had quietly settled into the position of housekeeper. Mrs. Stanhope felt as if a weight had been lifted off her conscience since she had found this practical use for the orphan whom the fates, not herself, had placed on a lower platform than Virginia. Now, Olga need never leave her unless she herself so desired, which Mrs. Stanhope certainly hoped she would not, as she was so quiet and quick to comprehend, and already was such a comfort to her under her affliction. No! plainly there was no reason why they should not all go on for years, forever, maybe, just as they were. Poor child, she was so innocent of all complicity in the

wickedness of her father, and the frailty of her mother, and so deserving, that it was a comfort to have matters adjust themselves nicely for her benefit! Mrs. Stanhope quite rejoiced to think the child, so docile and quick and amiable, would be with her always.

One morning when Olga, a trifle late, by reason of extra pantry duty, entered the library flushed and hurried, eager to begin the pleasantest task of her day, reading to Mrs. Stanhope for an hour, she found Virginia seated on the hassock at the old lady's feet, with the open book upon her lap. Eustis was there, as he generally was during the reading. With his feet on the low window sill, his chair tilted far back, a cigar between his teeth, and his eyes fixed gloomily on the cape jasmine bush that grew close by the library windows, he had come to smoke his morning cigar there, as he did every day, in concession to his mother's gentle insistance.

"You are there, Olga?" Mrs. Stanhope said, as Ginia stopped reading for explanations to be made.

"Yes'm."

"You have so much to do, especially at this time of the morning, that it will be best for Virginia to take this duty off your hands," said Mrs. Stanhope, planting her thorn courteously.

"As you please, ma'am, of course," said Olga, with a brave show of acquiescence, but with a fierce inward pang. Then she quietly slipped from the room, and a

little later on, pulled a big sun-bonnet well down over her eyes, as she started for the poultry yard, to hide the red and swollen lids.

"You have changed your reader, I see," said Eustis, bringing his chair down somewhat noisily, as Virginia closed the book, and, going out, left him alone with his mother.

"Yes. Olga has so much else to do."

"I imagine she did not complain of that."

"No. She is very cheerful and willing. Olga never complains of any thing. She knows her place and is thoroughly self-respecting."

"I think you have scarcely done yourself justice in making the exchange. She is a much better reader than Virginia."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Stanhope, in that intensely cold voice with which she generally discouraged further argument.

But, well remembered as that icy inflection was, and potent as it had been in Eustis's more timid days, he placidly pursued the subject now, by asking:

"By-the-way, mother, by what conditions did you bind yourself when you took these orphans into your keeping?"

"I was to give them a home, all the advantages of a plain English education, and such training as might fit them to take care of themselves, until they were eighteen."

"And then?"

"Then, if they so desire, they are at liberty to choose their own walk in life, and I shall not influence them to remain with me against their will."

"Has it ever occurred to you that either one of them might ever care to take such a step?"

"As leaving me?"

"Yes."

"Not Virginia, I hope!"

"No. Not Virginia. I do not think she ever suffers from a flicker of independence. But Olga! That girl has no ordinary amount of character in her face."

"Olga will be eighteen next June," says Mrs. Stanhope frigidly; "she will then be entirely at liberty to do as she pleases. I shall make no effort to detain her against her will."

"You do not seem to have taken her into your affections as closely as you have the other one; and yet, to my seeing, she is the prettier, more intelligent, and better mannered of the two children. She certainly has the better disposition."

"Olga is——"

Mrs. Stanhope stopped with a high flush on both cheeks. Every inclination of her heart pointed to a revelation! Every instinct of honor forbade it!

"She is—what?" Eustis asked, surprised into curiosity by his mother's evident effort not to enlighten him.

"Olga is—set apart," said Mrs. Stanhope finally, with cruel vagueness that left its innocent object stamped with some undefined stain.

"Set apart!"

Eustis repeated the words with a scoffing laugh. "I presume that means the sins of the fathers, no marriage ring, etc., etc. I imagine whosoever takes children out of an orphan asylum runs just such risks."

"There was no risk to run in my case," said his mother haughtily. "I was a lonely woman, desirous of doing a mite of good in the world. I believe I have done it in giving these two girls a happier childhood than they could possibly have had otherwise."

"Perhaps!"

"Perhaps! What do you mean, Eustis?" Mrs. Stanhope moved uneasily in her chair to face her son's voice.

"I mean that childhood has a faculty for manufacturing happiness for itself out of any surroundings short of absolute brutality. But I doubt if the girl Olga would not have been better left where she was. If she is indeed 'set apart,' as you so mysteriously put it, the less she learned of the possibilities of the world for pleasure and happiness the better for her. Don't you think so?"

Mrs. Stanhope's knitting-needles clicked impatiently for the space of an unbroken minute of silence, then:

"Why do you analyze Olga rather than Virginia?"

"Because," said Eustis, with a short contemptuous laugh, "prettiness, minus a soul, is soon resolved into its component parts of soft cheeks, red lips, bright eyes and white teeth. You see I have analyzed your favorite. But there is a capacity for suffering in the other one that makes one feel like being a little premature in offering pity."

"Decidedly premature, I should say. In fact your interest in Olga is altogether uncalled for. If she fails to attend to your comfort in the capacity of my housekeeper, you will please report her to me."

Eustis laughed lightly, and stooped to touch his mother's cheek with his lips before leaving her.

"Thy speech bewrayeth thee! Don't be alarmed, mother. I've no notion of falling in love with either of your orphans, much less with the one who is avowedly 'set apart.' The woman who is to perpetuate the name of Stanhope, and to succeed your ladyship as mistress of the old Hall, must at least know who her own mother and father were."

And Virginia, moving swiftly away from the thin partition of lath and paper that had permitted every word of this conversation to fall into her eagerly strained ears, sped up stairs to her own room, where, locking herself in, she shed hot tears of passionate resentment.

"He says I have no soul!" she sobbed, demanding pity of herself for herself. "And that I never have a

flicker of independence; and I'm nothing but the 'other one' to him. But, but," here resentment was ingulfed in curiosity, "mercy, don't I wish I knew what she means by Olga being set apart! And I'll never rest until I find out. Never! never! never!"

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS DENTON GIVES A DINNER.

LITTLE Miss Denton was in what might be called a state of pleasurable fermentation on a certain day in the early autumn of the year we are in. Her persistent efforts to draw the Stanhopes a little out of their self-absorbing gloom, were about to receive some recognition. The dear little old philanthropist had suddenly developed an amount of egotistical appreciation of her own importance, that found final expression in an invitation to a dining and in its acceptance.

As the invitation was quaint and pathetic, and altogether unconventional, it is worth transcribing. This is how it read : " My dear Eustis—I've known you, man and boy, ever since you were about ten years old, and, in all that time, I can not recall that I ever asked a favor at your hands. It is about time I was making amends for my shortcomings in that respect. To-morrow will mark the—(bless me, where's the use of telling every body the exact date on which one entered this troublesome world?)—is my birthday! I have a fancy not to spend it all by myself, indulging in the sage, or silly,

reflections that are in order on such occasions. That I was born without any consultation as to my individual preferences in the matter, is an uncontradictable fact, that I am still here and want you all to come over and brighten by your presence what may possibly be the last anniversary in an old woman's calendar of life —is another. I don't want a vacant chair around my table to-morrow, which will be set for five people."

And Eustis, smiling a trifle bitterly to think what barren days he had fallen upon when he could extract any satisfaction from such a source, had written a boyishly affectionate acceptance, and so, they were all coming.

"Rose!"

Miss Denton sent her voice out to the back gallery, where Rose, (much stronger and less emaciated by far than when we first saw her), sat patiently cutting up okra pods into little round slices, which she would string after a while, and hang up to dry for Miss Denton's winter supply of "gumbo."

"Yes'm!" she called back without moving. Her lap full of okra pods, somewhat hampered her.

"Rose! I am going to give a dinner party to-morrow, and I want to talk with you about it."

"A dinner party! That's something wuth talkin' 'bout. I'll be with you, ma'am, jus' as soon as ever I can rid my lap of this yer mess."

In all the months Rose had been with Miss Denton

now, no one had ever sat down to the unnecessarily large table in the unnecessarily spacious dining-room but the little old lady herself, who, perched in one of the old-fashioned, high-backed dining-room chairs, which showed, from a rear view, only a section of the tucking-comb in her back hair, had always impressed Rose, unimpressionable as she generally was, as a much lonelier object than a solitary sparrow on the house-top. Notwithstanding that Rose had come to the old Rodman place with the avowed intention of staying only until she should have earned money enough to take her further on to her mother over in Louisiana, she was staying on quite indefinitely and contentedly in the old aimless fashion—quiescent until some fresh impetus in the current of her days should set her adrift once more. "Perhaps, after all," she reasoned within herself, "mammy may be dead. Then I would have given up a good place for no gain. Better hold on, 'till you know for certain when t' let go." So, she "held on," not feeling morally or legally bound to any one person, or place, or course of action. So long as things were pleasant, Rose was passive. And shrewd Miss Denton read her as easily as if she had been a primer printed in double pica.

"Yes, Rose, a real dinner party!" Miss Denton repeats quite grandly, when Rose presently presents herself, wiping her sticky hands on the corner of her apron.

"How many folks?" Rose asks practically.

"Five."

"Five! Why that'll about clean out the neighborhood, won't it?"

Miss Denton laughed abstractedly. She was setting to-morrow's dinner table, and cooking to-morrow's dinner, and dressing herself for to-morrow's festival all at once.

"No, oh, no," she said in tardy reply, "there are a good many white people scattered about among these old hills when you come to look for them. This is only one household, Mrs. Stanhope's family."

"That's the old blind lady at the Hall."

"Yes, poor dear thing."

"I thought she didn't have no fam'ly but one son."

"No family proper," said Miss Denton, who, for lack of other outlet, frequently made colloquial use of Mrs. Banks, "but she has two young orphan girls whom she has reared almost like her own children and they really are portions of her family. They are almost young ladies now. And very happy girls they are. I only hope nothing will ever occur to make them less so."

The closing clause of this sentence was given with an aggressiveness that was altogether thrown away on her listener. It was as if Miss Denton in capacity of judge was charging a jury.

"That was one of 'em that walked through the

woods with me, that fust day?" said Mrs. Banks, always willing to prolong her social chats with her mistress.

"Yes. The older, the prettier and the better. Olga is a sweet good girl and I love her very much."

"She seemed like a rale nice young lady. Purty mannered, you know."

Miss Denton fidgeted a trifle nervously and said with some tartness: "Yes, she's all that. Now then to our dinner. You know Betsy can never be relied upon in an emergency. Whenever you want things best she can be relied upon to have them worst. She gets the "trimbles," as she calls it, over the slightest variation in routine. It would never do to trust the pie-crust to her, nor am I ever sure how her light bread is going to turn out," which remarks naturally diverted the discussion from the coming banqueters to the banquet itself, and Miss Denton found to her pleased surprise, that she had a very able coadjutor in Mrs. Banks.

"Why really, Rose!" she said in a final burst of enthusiasm over the perfected programme, "I believe I can trust you to attend to the entire affair, and I'll play lady to-morrow. One would actually think the superintending of dinner-parties was quite in your line."

"Not lately," the woman answered, a dark cloud passing suddenly over her face that had brightened under her mistress's words of praise, "but a long time ago, when mammy was Mr. Trowbridge's cook and housekeeper, I've had the settin' of many a fine table for

quality folks, and many's the fine dinner I've holp mammy to figger out for the young master. Some things we don't never forget in this world, Miss Denton."

"That is true, Rose, very true, my poor girl," said her mistress, sobered at the mention of Waring's name. Then she picked up her big needles and fell to knitting silently, while Rose went back to her okra pods on the sunny back gallery.

Rose seemed quite bent on making Miss Denton's birthday fête a shining sucess. Despite the buffetings she had endured at the hand of fate, there was in her a deep-seated kindliness of heart and an impulsive if not enduring sense of gratitude, that made of her employer for the time being the object of her warmest affection. Totally untrained morally and mentally, stunned and blunted in her finest sensibilities, her very ignorance of a higher heritage endowed her with a certain soft humility inexpressibly touching, to whomsoever could see in her any thing more than a haggard and rather slatternly serving woman, attached to a thoughtful and considerate mistress.

Dressed with unusual regard for tidiness and smiling benignantly, she held herself in readiness to relieve the ladies from Stanhope Hall of their veils and bonnets the next day, when Eustis deposited the three of them on Miss Denton's front steps and drove around to the stable in the rear.

Olga nodded pleasantly to her acquaintance of the woods, and Rose received the recognition smilingly. Miss Denton's keen eyes were upon them. Surely if her pretty Olga really were standing in the presence of her mother, nature would give some hint of the shameful secret. Perhaps Rose already knew! Perhaps she had followed the child here! Perhaps she was planning her own time and manner of revelation! But the placid look that rested only a second on the girl's face, before she turned to offer her arm to Mrs. Stanhope forbade such a wild theory.

No. It was evident, that strong as the girl's likeness to Waring Trowbridge was, it had never yet occurred to Rose, to imagine that the child she had left years before in the Cleveland asylum, was standing in her presence on the hills of Mississippi.

"And may it never occur to her!" Miss Denton mentally ejaculated, bustling about her visitors in a perfect flutter of mixed nervousness and satisfaction.

"This wretched veil! It's tied in a dozen knots I do believe," said Ginia crossly, dropping her tired arms by her side and turning her veiled face toward where Olga was standing ready to lead Mrs. Stanhope across the hall to the sitting-room.

"Can I help you, miss?" Rose was at her back with the words. "You've been a-tuggin' so hard," she said with a laugh, "that you've worsened matters considerable."

"Well, we will leave Miss Virginia in your hands, Rose. Mr. Eustis has had enough of himself by this time," said Miss Denton, as she led the way, followed by Mrs. Stanhope and Olga.

"Seems like you mus' 'a' been in a hurry when you tied this veil on this morning," says Rose at Ginia's back.

"I was. I'm always in a hurry. Somebody is forever saying, do make haste, Virginia! I hate to be hurried."

"And you've tied a little bunch of hair and the ends of a blue velvet string and the veil all together."

"Cut it if you can't untie it. I'm not going to spend the day here under my veil," Ginia says imperatively.

"Is there any beads that'll spill off, if I cuts the string sorter sudden like?" Rose asks, coming back from Miss Denton's work-stand with a pair of scissors in her hand.

"Nothing but this trumpery!" says Ginia, jerking from her bosom a bunch of jingling trifles, "and I don't know that it would make any difference if they were spilled or not, as you call it; I just keep on wearing them because it seems as if I'd been born with them on."

Rose glanced at the trifles with slight curiosity. An ashen pallor overspread her face, and the scissors dropped with harsh clatter to the ground. She stooped and picked them up with a trembling hand.

"You'll let me look at 'em, missy, won't you?" she asked with the timid reverence of one asking permission to handle the crown jewels of England. She took in her dusky fingers the trumpery which Ginia extended toward her the full length of the velvet. The girl slightly recoiled from the close contact. The hand was the hand of a mulatto!

"I'll give them to you," she said with a petulant laugh, "since you admire them so much, if you'll only free me from this abominable veil. I'm tired of standing here."

A smooth agate watch-seal with the velvet slipped through its gold loop! A small silver mounted alligator's tooth, and a pierced quarter of a dollar! That was what Ginia's "trumpery" consisted of. Rose turned the coin absently in her hand. "1852," she muttered, "yes, that's the date."

She silently snipped the velvet in two where it was knotted with the hair and the veil. Then with nerveless hands she loosed the knot and lifted the veil from the girl's face, fastening her eyes in a passionate hungry gaze on the fresh young beauty now revealed to her.

"Here take them! I said you might have them. The twenty-five cent piece is the only thing worth taking."

"I wouldn't part with 'em, honey, if I was you. Maybe yo' mammy put 'em roun' yo' neck when you was little and she was nigh to you."

Ginia winced at the word "mammy." "White children have mothers, Rose, little darkeys have 'mammys'," she said lightly, laying her hat on the bed and passing her hands over the hair that rippled crisply to its very roots.

Rose's throat emitted a gasping, gurgling sound, but Ginia was thinking more of her own pretty reflection in the glass than of this queer chamber-maid of Miss Denton's.

"Maybe yo' mam—your ma's dead, then," said the woman, whose wistful eyes followed every motion of the lithe young form before the glass.

"Of course she is!" Ginia's voice was growing repellent under this oppressive curiosity. She was studying the effect of the powder on her nose. Miss Denton did keep such poor stuff in her toilet case, "I'm sorry I can't remember her."

"I wouldn't part with 'em, honey, if I was you." Rose advanced with the mended velvet in her hands. "I 'spect you cut yo' first tooth on this little alligator tooth, an' maybe you used to sorter think this little seal was the purties' thing in the worl'!"

"Maybe I did. But I'm never going to cut any more teeth, Rose, and I don't think the seal a bit pretty now. I've said I was going to throw the things away a dozen times!"

"All the same, I'd keep on a wearin' of 'em, missy. Let me tie 'em roun' yo' neck oncet mo'!"

"What a queer woman you are. You really sound as if you were begging for something. Of course I don't want to force the things on you. Ollie says she don't believe I could sleep of nights if I should miss them from my neck."

She bent her head for Rose to retie the string about her neck. "You don't wear no ear-rings," said the woman, her burning gaze passing from Ginia's pretty pink ears back to her amused eyes.

"No! some stupid pierced one ear and left the other unpierced, and I'd like to punish them for it some way."

"Maybe y' ma done that too!"

"Did what?"

"Punched one ear an' then couldn't stan' hearin' you cry an' let t'other one alone. You know mammies—or—mothers is mighty tender hearted things, missy. Does you remember any thing 't all about your'n?"

"No, nothing at all."

"Maybe she died when you was real little."

"I believe she did."

"Down South here?"

"No, up North. There, I hope you're done questioning."

"Yo' boot's unbuttoned at the top, missy, let Rose button it for you."

Virginia planted her foot on a round of the nearest chair. Rose kneeled and closed the gap left by the

heedless wearer of the little boots. She lingered over her task.

"Thank you, you're real obliging," says the girl, bringing her foot down to the floor and skipping gayly out of the room before the slower moving Rose had risen to her feet.

Like a Brahmin making salutation at the throne of his idolatry, Rose, with clasped hands pressed to her wildly beating heart, bent her forehead until her lips rested on the spot the girl's feet had just touched. She kissed it twice, thrice, a dozen times passionately, then stood up quickly and glanced about to see if her strange action had been seen of any other eye than the All-seeing One.

"She's mine! She's mine! My purty darlin'! My sweet baby! God fetched me here so's I might have the comfort uv lookin' at her. Jus' lookin' at her. I wouldn't claim her, oh no, I wouldn't shame her! She shan't never know but what she had a mother, 'stead uv only a po' no 'count mammy like me. I wouldn't spile yo' chances, my sweety, not if dis po' heart breaks for the want of a kiss or a word of love from them sweet lips. De Lord's done better by her, than I could 'a' done. She's in His hands an' thar I'll leave her, my purty one, my ve'y own."

Going up to the bed she picked up the veil and the hat and the gloves that Ginia had flung down there. She kissed them reverently, fondling them, and wiping

the scalding tears from her eyes for fear they might fall on her darling's things and leave a stain! The stain of a mother's tears! Miss Denton's voice broke discordantly upon her trance of emotion. She was wanted! Hastily dropping the little gloves she had been caressing, she slipped out by a back way, and when Miss Denton, despairing of making her hear, came finally in search of her, she found her engrossed in the mysteries of a custard for dinner.

CHAPTER XV.

SEED BY THE WAYSIDE.

TO Eustis Stanhope, fresh from the teeming activities of the old world cities, where the necessity for recreation and the duty of amusing oneself is seriously recognized and gone about with as much of systematic deliberation as is bestowed upon any other obligation, the stagnant possibilities of life as he viewed it now were little less than appalling. His choice of homes lay between Stanhope Hall and the plantation across the river in the Louisiana swamp. In the one he would lead the life of a well-cared-for ruminant, a sort of stall-fed animal, with all his useless strength and capabilities pent up within a sleek well-curried hide; in the other the ruminant might apply his muscle to the drudgery of the work oxen and exchange his sleekness for a more creditable shagginess, with occasional honorable scars from the friction of the heavy yoke, or the prodding of the ox goad! Neither alternative appealed to his sympathies very attractively. As things had turned out, it would have been infinitely preferable if that European experiment had never been tried. It was just so much

money wasted. His dream of supplementing his studies with travel, accompanied by his mother, had been rudely shattered, and there was nothing left for him to do but to take up the life others were leading around him. That he could infuse a new spirit into the sluggish current of society in his own neighborhood never once occurred to him, or that he could go across to the plantation and there inaugurate a grand move toward the enlightenment of his one time slaves never occurred to him either. No Stanhope had ever been radical in any respect. They had always been pre-eminently conservative. If, as a family, they had possessed any special private policy, it had been a sort of *laissez-faire* principle until opposition had touched that one supremely sensitive spot, personal honor. Therefore, it came perfectly natural to this last representative of the name to accept things as he found them, and, if the truth were known, it is probable the disappointed youth took considerable credit to himself for taking them as well as he did. This is how he found the two alternatives of his life, Stanhope Hall or the plantation, staring him in the face.

Settled down at the Hall he could see the days stretching into weeks, the weeks into months, and the months into years, with scarce one shade of color more or less dark to distinguish the one from the other. Life had come to a stand-still in that region since the war, and the most fertile imagination could conjure up

no reason why it should ever move on again at a more rapid pace. Apart from the erection of the cotton factories that had given a wholesome impetus to one branch of trade, and been the occasion of a sort of mushroom growth of small cottages suitable for the needs of the factory hands, and the ambitious little railroad whose capacity for growth would be exhausted by the time it reached Jackson, there was nothing upon which to predicate a brighter future for his native place. The town swarmed with young men of his own caliber. Born into a sphere of life where the necessity for being trained for work in the trenches of the great battle of humanity against Fate had not seemed very urgent, they found themselves placed by circumstances in the very hottest of the fray, unarmed, undrilled, powerless! Little better than so many targets for the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. It dimly dawned on Eustis, that his mother would have consulted his best interests, if, when the war left her sole arbitrator of his fortunes, she had apprenticed him to some honest craftsman, or handed him over bodily to some energetic business man to be molded into something better than a sort of ornamental lay figure that the European trainers had sent back to grace (?) his ancestral halls. Small comfort to him that he was only one of a multitude in like predicament. (Young men with the average Caucasian's intelligence, energy and capacity, with absolutely nothing upon

which to expend them.) In profitless review of the outlook and the avenues of activity that summed up so meagerly, he began with the professions, according the ministry priority by courtesy. The few churches of his native place were more than adequate for the requirements of the regular church-goers, and each pulpit had its incumbent that was mellowing and growing old in unison with the mellowing of the structures themselves. Missionary work was scarcely possible, as, apart from the few well organized ecclesiastical families, the colored people were the only subjects for evangelistic work, and they clung tenaciously to the color-line insistance of colored preachers for colored congregations. Not that Eustis for a second contemplated action in that line. It was simply one process of that mental review of the possibilities of the situation by which he was proving to himself that every avenue of usefulness was closed against him. The doctors were the same all sufficient lot he remembered from his earliest boyhood. Even the hand of disease seemed restfully folded in that serene atmosphere of healthfulness, where was none of that rush and skurry and mental excitement or bodily exhaustion that superinduces sickness or hastens dissolution. He could not flatter himself that the medical profession was suffering for lack of his adoption. The lawyers! They were like so many rats in a barn from which all the grain has been long since removed. They scampered about

the barren dusty floor in hopes of an occasional sound kernel, and while it was all luck who should get the rare grain, it was a melancholy surety that the majority would have to satisfy their cravings with husks. Trade avenues were scarce and choked to repletion by the fortunate few who had friends at court. So there was nothing but the mechanical departments left. And there! Why with the will and determination of a dozen Napoleon Bonapartes rolled into one, he could not plane a rough plank into a smooth one or lay one square foot of a brick wall acceptably to the most indulgent of contractors! So that life at the Hall must resolve itself into rising in time for a late breakfast, lounging about the house with a cigar in his mouth for an hour or two after breakfast, riding into town first to the post-office, then to "some fellow's" office, where a lot of other fellows would join him to beguile the empty hours by talking of the hard lines they had all fallen upon, or drearily discuss some moldy bit of gossip, or fatuously wonder what the country was coming to, or vainly construct possible futures for themselves or their neighborhood out of material as intangible as the baseless fabric of a dream! After which, he would canter, perhaps alone, or perhaps in company with some other cumberer of the earth, back over the often trod ground, back to the big lonely house, back to the quiet presence of the blind woman who sat with pathetic patience through all the joyless days, smiling only

when he chose to make her smile. Back to dispatch a dinner eaten at the heathenish hour of two o'clock and which left on his hands the burden of a long afternoon in which nothing came between another cigar (smoked amid the lonely grandeur of the library whose well filled shelves did not supply all the cravings of a young and lusty nature), and the blessed oblivion of the night time!

"Great God, and there are so many years of it to be lived through!" He said it aloud! then looked across the table to where Olga sat behind the breakfast things, frowned first and then laughed apologetically. He was late at table! Mrs. Stanhope had long since finished her breakfast and was then walking slowly up and down the sunny terraces where the azaleas grew, leaning on Virginia's arm. Ginia would infinitely have preferred pouring out coffee for the son to walking with the mother. But hers and Olga's duties were clearly defined, and she had never yet ventured on any act of overt disobedience.

Olga looked up from the crochet table-mat that kept her fingers busy while she was waiting for him to finish his meal, and said with a little air of patronizing pity that sat quaintly enough upon the pauper orphan, addressing the heir of the house:

"I know just what you mean, and I am so very sorry for you. I wish I could help you, but I don't know how. It must be dreadful to be so rich that one

can not work. Working kills the time as nothing else can. But I suppose there's nothing you could do!" with gravely inquiring eyes.

"Nothing, little Mentor," said Eustis, pushing his chair back with an impatient gesture. He was annoyed that he should have given this quaint girl an opportunity to pity him. Not that she did it in any wise offensively. She seemed always, in her demure manner, to be studying the problems of the lives that came under her observation, and her commentaries thereon were almost involuntary. In an unobtrusive fashion Olga had laid her girlish hand upon the helm, and whether consciously or unconsciously, those about her were submitting to her sway. Now with a word of encouragement, now with a coaxing smile, again with a soft spoken plea, or yet again with mocking raillery so gently dealt that it was like pelting its subject with rose leaves, she managed, without once impressing her own personality upon her sentiments to exert a most beneficent influence on the household. And Eustis, to her singularly fearless nature, was no more awe-inspiring than Virginia in her wayward petulance. Even now her earnest eyes asked pardon for the daring of her lips as she went on :

"Will we go over to the plantation as we always do in spring, Mr. Stanhope? It is so pretty and busy there in the early plowing time. There is so much more to interest one there than here. It is grand here, but—"

"But what?"

[He was still seated, was rolling up his napkin very deliberately while she was speaking. He was always singularly indulgent to Olga's utterances, so much so, that when put on the defensive by his own conscience and his mother he had said explanatorily, "The child is neither pert nor forward. She never speaks unless she seems impelled to do so by something within her stronger than inclination. It is literally from the fullness of her heart that her lips speak, and what she says is always worth listening to."]

"This is the sort of place a man ought to come back to rest in, after he has done something in the world to tire him."

"And you think one could find that exhaustive sort of occupation over on the plantation do you, little Olga? Shall I look for it in the busy whirr of my gin-stands? or in the maddening activity of the picking season? or in the soul-satisfying occupation of issuing pork and meal to the hands?"

"You are laughing at me," says Olga, flushing a little as she carefully puts the top on the sugar bowl and walks away with it to lock it up in the safe, "and yet, there is better work than that to be found over on the plantation."

"I am laughing at you now," says Eustis, watching the conscientious removal of the sugar and the butter and the cream to the locked safe; "it strikes me as

inexpressibly funny, this pains-taking over the small leakages and the reckless expenditure in large things. Now, doubtless, you would feel as if you had committed a great moral trangression if you failed to turn the key on that sugar bowl, or did not guard that little red and white key-basket with the jealous vigilance of a Cerberus?"

"Yes!" says Olga, dubiously taking up the basket in question, and smiling at him in a perplexed fashion. "I am obeying Mrs. Stanhope's orders, but I sometimes wonder if one can teach honesty to servants by showing them so plainly that you don't believe they have any. I sometimes wonder if it wouldn't be better to spend more time in teaching them and less in watching them! They must have consciences, you know, somewhere."

Eustis was fairly on his feet now, and there was no smile on his face.

"You are handling a bigger thing than your key-basket now, child. Best confine your speculations for a little time to come to smaller matters than to the enlightenment of the hands on the plantation or about the yard here, either."

"I was not thinking of them as 'hands'," says Olga daringly. "I was thinking of them as souls."

But she doubted whether he had even heard her, he walked away so very rapidly, and presently she saw him join his mother on the terrace and take his place

by her other side. She was busying herself about the lamps in the pantry when Ginia came to her a little later on with an amiable proffer of assistance.

"I believe I do want a little help this morning, Ginia. Mr. Stanhope was so very late to breakfast, and I've got to make lemon custards for dinner. You're sure Mrs. Stanhope won't want you just yet?"

"Not for half an hour," says Ginia, daintily selecting the polishing of the chimneys as the least offensive branch of lamp cleaning. "By the way, Olga," she says, blowing softly into the chimney and eying it critically in search of cloudy spots, "what did you say to Mr. Eustis to send him out on the terrace so huffy?"

"So huffy!" Olga paused with the coal-oil can poised in mid-air. She was too surprised to rest it on any thing.

"Yes, huffy! I heard him say to his mother that: 'that child Olga had gotten hold of some very odd notions.' That he shouldn't wonder if you developed into a first class missionary some of these days, with the darkeys for your scholars, and his mother told him she did not think it was right for him to encourage you to talk such nonsense; and he said, he was not aware that he had encouraged you, in fact, he did not think you needed much encouragement, when a new idea took possession of you. And I'm so afraid, Ollie, that he thinks you quite bold. I don't tell you this to make you uncomfortable, but because I think you ought to

know how very much displeased he seemed about something and Aunty Stanhope too," she added, in her most airy manner; and having thus implanted her thorn, Ginia's interest in the lamp cleaning process so rapidly diminished that Olga was soon left alone to finish the task and to ruminate over what she had just heard. Had she been bold without knowing it? She flushed hot at the thought.

While Eustis out on the terrace was saying to his mother: "There is a substratum of good common-sense in every thing she says, too. I find myself wondering though, what has given a charity girl with such limited opportunities her extremely thoughtful bent. One would expect to find her, as Virginia is, grateful for a home, thankful for her food and clothing, intent only on securing their continuance by her good behavior, rather than puzzling her girlish brain over social problems."

"I shall take occasion to reprove Olga for her forwardness," says Mrs. Stanhope severely. "My helplessness is likely to prove a calamity in more ways than one. She is the last one around me though whom I should have suspected of taking advantage of it. I am afraid the prominence I have been compelled to give her has turned her head a little. It is excessively presumptuous for her to forget that she is left at table for no other purpose than to pour out your coffee."

Eustis flung his cigar over the terrace with angry

impatience! Why was it he could never approach the subject of Olga's peculiarities without throwing his mother into this state of unreasonable asperity? The girl interested him as a study. But it was a study that he resolved to pursue in the future unaided. He had not meant to involve the little thing in trouble. What a whining cub of a tell-tale he was being made to appear!

"If you say any thing to Olga on this subject, mother, I shall be excessively annoyed. There never was a young girl freer from presumption or conceit. She can no more help the peculiar trend of her mind than she can the color of her hair and eyes."

"Perhaps," says Mrs. Stanhope impatiently, "they all have one common origin."

"And," Eustis continues generously, not noticing her interruption, "it was because she simply voiced my own inward dissatisfaction this morning, that I laid so much stress on her words."

"What especially?"

"She spoke of this place as grand and stately and just the sort of a place a man should want to come back to rest in after he had accomplished something in the world."

"Insufferable!" says Mrs. Stanhope, and Eustis could feel the hand resting on his arm trembling with rage.

"Precocious, perhaps, but scarcely insufferable. On the contrary, I think you fail entirely to do full justice to

this one of your orphans. No!" he gently tightened his hold on his mother's hand, as he felt her drawing it away from his clasp, "I do not intend to permit any misunderstanding of our relative positions, mother. If Olga, think of it, mother, nameless Olga, were what she is, and the acknowledged possessor of some honorable name you and I would both hold her in priceless esteem. As it is, she is an object of my most profound pity and I would not insult her helplessness by one disrespectful thought. That she interests me I do not deny, but I beg of you once and for all, to remember that no effort on your part could possibly widen the breach between us. A breach that is already as wide as the space from pole to pole."

Mrs. Stanhope was silenced, but not satisfied. That Eustis meant every word he said she did not doubt. But she knew the possibilities and the dangers that loomed up before them all very much better than he in his youthful ignorance possibly could. The very element of pity, that he already confessed to, was alarming. Rigid as were her views on the subject of her pledged word, she began seriously to contemplate an unreserved statement of facts to her son. Once let him suspect that a drop of negro blood tainted Olga's veins and—he was safe. In the exaggeration of her terror she began to accuse herself of criminality in harboring one even so remotely tainted. Olga had wound herself about her affections inextricably—but—Olga must go!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PRODIGAL AT HOME.

SPRING-TIME with its many voiced activities held the fleeting months in gentle bondage once more. On the plantation over the river a general note of preparation was sounding that stirred even the sluggish pulses of old Dora, now nearing the end of her allotted span.

When the plow hands began to turn up the dark, rich mold with the shining blade; and the wild bees swarmed and buzzed about the lofty tree tops; and the wrens came again to the cranny in the cabin eaves where they had nested unmolested year after year so regularly; and the sweet white pendants of the locust trees swayed like fragrant censers in the soft spring air, Dora took up the out-door life that contributed so much to the general comfort of the house-hold by adding spring vegetables to the rather monotonous diet of pickled pork. With her lap full of seed bags of all sizes and descriptions, she sat upon the rough hewn block that formed the one step up from the yard into the cabin door, trying to decide whether it was "settled

enough" to entrust her cabbage seed to the beds so carefully prepared by Reuben. The question to sow or not to sow just then perplexed Dora's mind to the exclusion of any other.

Reuben had come from the garden to aid in her decision, and stood leaning on his hoe-handle while Dora exultingly displayed her wealth of peas and beans and okra and cabbage seeds saved by her own thrift. Time deals leniently with the sons and daughters of Ham. Years may come and go with scarcely a change of lineament or the adding of a line to their creaseless features. Nor is this strange. Simple in their habits, living their lives largely in the open air, devoid of mental worries, and incapable from lack of training to take thought for the morrow, they vegetate peacefully through the eventless years that bridge the space between their cradles and their graves.

This is why old Dora, sitting on the cabin step intent upon her seed discussion, and Reuben, leaning hatless and coatless on his hoe-handle, looked so very unchanged to a woman who laid her hand upon the wooden latch of their rickety yard gate before they had discovered her approach. It was hard for her to realize the number of years that had rolled over her head and theirs, since she had last heard their voices.

It was the dropping of the wooden latch and the low admonitory growl of the shaggy cur curled up on the gallery behind them, that made the old people look

up at last and stare at the advancing figure. It was Rose, who greeted them suddenly.

"Howdy, mammy! Howdy, daddy!"

She held out her hand in its rusty black cotton glove. Reuben was nearest to her and he mechanically extended his, all grimy as it was with the soil he had been crumbling for the cabbage seed, but no glimmer of recognition came into his face. Rose's voice betrayed no agitation, no resentment as she turned toward her mother. The cultivation of the affections and the emotions was no part of the cult of their race.

"Don't you know me, mammy? It's me! Rose!"

Dora stared at her hard, resting both outstretched hands on her knees, which were far apart to make a capacious lap for the numberless seed bags. Her breath came thick and heavily, her head wagged slowly in a voiceless negative! The woman before her was thin and old and haggard! Her Rose was young and pretty and plump! She was not to be deceived so easily.

"I don' know nuffin 'tall 'bout you," she says presently. You may 'mammy' me till kingdom come en you can't fool me inter callin' you Rose! Go way, nigger, you 'spose I done forgit my own chile, ef she wur a good fur nuffin triflin' critter en runned away from me?"

This was a catastrophe that Rose had not anticipated. She had imagined a variety of things intervening to prevent her and her mother from coming together

again, but, that she should stand in her mother's presence and fail of being recognized and gladly welcomed was not among the possibilities she had imagined.

"You don't mean you done forgot me, mammy? And you too, daddy? Indeed, indeed I'm Rose."

"Go 'way, I tell you! I don' know nuffin 'tall 'bout you! Reuben," seeing the perplexity in the old man's face, "don't you go en let no triflin' yaller gal like that fool you into thinkin' she's our Rose! why, Reube, don't you 'member my Rosie no better 'n that? Rose's cheeks was as round as a apple, an' her eyes shined bright as de stars, and she usen to keep herself smart en trim like, don't you know, Reube? Ef you's huntin' work," turning severely on Rose, "you' jes as well step on up t' house. Reuben's got all the help he wants in his squad, en I ain' got no use for them which don' look like dey could swing a cat by de tail. You look sorter sickly like. Thar's de road to de big house. Mebbe w'ite folks kin fin' some use fer you."

Dora extended one long sinewy arm in the direction of the road over which she and the child she was now harshly repudiating had traveled so often hand in hand, while her lips closed with an uncompromising pressure.

"I knows that road well enough, mammy," says Rose, sullenly turning her back on the sight of it, "but I ain' gwine to travel it no mo' t' please you nor nobody else."

Poor Rose! This was not exactly the home coming she had looked forward to. She had expected the mother whose whole heart had been hers in that care-free childhood that seemed so very far away now, to receive her back with frantic demonstrations of joy! Bearing in mind her own recent instantaneous recognition of her child after the lapse of many years, she had come to think that the maternal instinct was an ineradicable one, including in its grasp something that went deeper than the organ of sight, rang truer than the organ of speech! But it was not of her heart disappointment that she was thinking as she looked straight into her mother's hard shriveled face after that defiant refusal to move on. She had not given up her easy berth at Miss Denton's and come back to the squalid discomfort of her mother's cabin causelessly. With the coming of the spring and the necessity for making new contracts with his hands and getting the plantation fairly started for another crop, Eustis Stanhope had left the Hall and brought his household of females over on the Louisiana side. And Rose no sooner heard of the flitting than a fierce desire to follow and to breathe the same air with her child, seized upon her, to the exclusion of every other consideration. In vain Miss Denton, divining the cause of her restlessness, and eager to shield her beloved Olga from this contact, reminded her of her promise to stay with her the year out. In vain she reproached her for the

black ingratitude of her going! All Rose would say was:—"I'm 'bleeged to go, Miss Denton. It's again' nature fer me not to go." So she had gone, and here she was, standing at the threshold of the old cabin door, face to face with the mother who had been idealized by memory into something very much more lovable than this old crone with the seamed and wrinkled cheeks, who refused her recognition.

Reuben, grown wise by experience, saw the angry blood mounting into Dora's swarthy cheeks. If this daring woman, standing there matching her sullenness against her mother's obstinacy, stood there very much longer, it was quite within the range of possibility, he knew, for Dora to eject her forcibly! He prudently gathered up his hoe and spade, mopped his bald head with the dingy bandanna that hung loosely about the neck of his hickory shirt, and shuffled back to the garden, casting apprehensive glances backward over his shoulder at the two women. Finally Rose hit upon a plan for proving her own identity.

"Is the old red plush chair in Mr. Waring's room yet, mammy, with the arm gone, that I used to rock in in front of the looking glass on the mantle-piece?" she asks ungrammatically.

"What you know 'bout dat chair, en dat glass, en dat house enny-which-a-way?" Dora asks, bending her shaggy brows to look more closely than she had yet done at the woman in front of her. But Rose had

seen the start she gave when she first began speaking, so went on glibly enough:

"And is they got a new hammock? I guess they's had many a one since I used t'almost slip through the bottom of the old one. Don't you remember, mammy, how I used to tie the holes together with twine strings an' swing an' swing whilest you was a-scrubbing up the gallery? An' the old cedar bucket with the brass hoops that stood on the water shelf, with the cocoa-nut dipper a-hanging on the nail over it, and you used to scrub the brass bands and hold the bucket up for me to see how funny my face looked in 'em, don't you remember, mammy? Is they there yet?"

Old Dora's hands, that had been jerking and flinging the seed bags about in her lap with nervous energy, dropped heavily upon her knees. Her tall strong form was tremulous with suppressed excitement, she leaned forward and scanned the thin yellow face eagerly. Time was dimming her vision she knew well, but could it be so dim that she would not know her own Rose, if she stood in front of her? She shook her head slowly from side to side in fresh negation of this woman's claims. "Yes," she said, "I remembers all that well 'nough! It was my purty little sassy Rose that done all that. But w'at's that got to do wid you? Yes, de old buckit's thar yit, but w'at you got to do wid it?"

"And don't you remember, mammy, how ole

Bose used to crawl through the place in the fence yonder, where the pickets was off, and foller us up t'the big house? I reckon Bose is dead now?"

"Yes, Bose is dead now," says old Dora, no longer combatively, only dreamily, as if she were submitting to the pilotage of this strange woman, who with resolute oars was carrying her backward against the current of time and against the current of her own will. "Yes, old Bose is dead now! He used to drive the cows home mouty straight of nights! He did."

"And don't you remember how I used to ride to meetin' behind you, mammy, on old Bet? and she didn't like none too much to carry double, and oncet, law me, how plain it all does come back to me, don't you remember, mammy, my red dress that you trimmed with black braid, an' none uv the folks in this place never did come up t'that dress, don't you remember how old Bet just seemed to wait till she got to the very softest of the mud for to kick up her heels and pitch me, red dress and all, into the nasties' puddle twixt here and old Miss Lathum's?"

Dora chuckled audibly at the reminiscence. "Dat owdacious old Bet, she were a tricky mule en no mistake! But I lay she got all the tricks tuk outer her befo' she died! Luke, he rid her off t' jine the soldiers up to Vicksburg. You know Luke, don't you?"

"You know me now, mammy, don't you?"

Thus brought suddenly back from the past to the

present, Dora started as one rudely awakened from sleep. What Rose did not know was that her mother's mental faculties were fast failing her. Physically she seemed hale and hearty yet, but the power of concentrating her mind on any thing for a long time, or of the process of connected reasoning was no longer hers. She fixed her eyes on Rose for a silent second, and then said in the most matter of fact voice;

"Knows you! co'se I knows you. Whar you bin all dis time, Rose? and whar you leff de boys?" Then without waiting for an answer, she continued monotonously, "and whar's yo' baby? It was a mean trick you played yo' po' old mammy, gal, a-runnin' away from her, an' you don' look like you'd made none too much outen yo' barg'in nuther. I suppose you ain' come back wid more money den you knows wat to do wid? not you. You wouldn't 'a' come crawlin' back to mammy lessin you was po' es a cat. But I don' mean you ain't welcome."

Her voice suddenly went out to Reuben bending over the cabbage bed in the garden, "Reuben! here's our Rose come back. She don' look none too strong, but den you know my Rosy weren't never one uv yo' work mules. Come here, honey, and hug yo' ole mammy. De closter you gits de plainer I kin see my chile in yo' eyes. I'se glad t'see you fo' sho."

And thus insensibly through the gamut of emotions from repellent distrust to clumsy rejoicing old Dora

passed, sitting there motionless with her lap full of seed, while the shabby prodigal unresentfully received her tardy recognition.

All she asked was a haven of refuge near enough to her pretty child for her to catch an occasional glimpse of her, or to come within sound of her fresh young voice, or to touch the hem of her garment with reverent fingers.

That her child should pass through life unscathed and unsuspected was the dream of poor Rose's own life! From the rich harvest of her daughter's blessings she expected to reap her own aftermath of content. It had been the passionate longing of her own early days "to be a lady!" Her child was a lady! should live a lady! marry like a lady! and die like one, with no suspicion of the taint in her blood to cloud her happiness. Already visions of Virginia winning the heart of Eustis Stanhope and reigning as absolute mistress in the stately old Hall over in the hills filled the mother's heart to repletion with proud satisfaction. Hungrily as she yearned for the privilege of infolding that girlish form in her arms, she would die of that hunger before she would jeopardize her darling's chances of being established in life as a lady. All she asked was to be the humble self-renouncing witness of her child's social exaltation. So, although this home-coming, even to her dulled and stunted sensibilities was rather grating, she accepted it unmurmuringly as open-

ing to her a stopping place where she could keep her unobserved watch over her daughter's progress.

That night when Reuben was snoring heavily, sleeping off the weariness that comes with honest toil, old Dora and her daughter sat on the threshold of the cabin door with the moonlight flooding their forms and faces and their rude surroundings, and softening their hearts and loosening their tongues in unison with its mellowing influences. Much was asked and told by the mother to the daughter and by the daughter to the mother. Finally a tired silence enveloped them both. It was broken by old Dora.

"Honey! you ain't never told me a word about yo' chile yit!" And in an evil moment, first binding her mother to solemn secrecy, Rose told the whole story of her child's life as she knew it herself up to the moment of their flitting to the plantation. It was with a spasm of frightened regret that she added:—"She's mine, mammy! But if ever you let her know about it or let her find out she belongs to such as you or me! I—I—"

"You! you'll w'at?" Dora asks mockingly.

"I'd—want to kill you," says Rose in a vicious undertone.

But Dora only chuckled in a senseless fashion. "You'se a fool, Rose. You allers was a fool! You never did know which side yo' bread was buttered on. You jus' let mammy 'lone."

Then Rose knew what a senseless thing she had done in telling her tremendous secret to the mother to whom she had always confided her childish wishes and her more mature troubles. It was that senseless childish chuckle of her mother's that made her recognize for the first time that she had intrusted her precious child's safety to the babbling instincts of a half-witted dotard.

A throb of guilty satisfaction stirred her heart that night as she lay awake thinking of her own imprudence.

"Thank God, she don't know now which one of them it is. She's sure to think it's the dark one, if she ever sees them, which ain't likely and her never leaving the house," and feeling relieved by the thought that if the worst came to the worst Olga would bear the odium meant for Virginia she fell at last into dreamless, conscienceless slumber.

CHAPTER XVII.

STORM SHAKEN.

APRIL, tentative and capricious, had mellowed into May, and the plantation was looking its very best. Spurred into emulous interest in their labors by the presence of the young owner of the place, the work had gone on with so much more vim than was customary that Mr. Waring Trowbridge, still Eustis's nominal adviser, congratulated him on the fact that the Hardlines crop promised better than any other in the parish.

The young man himself, wearied of the palsying inactivity of the life he led at the Hall, was surprised at the degree of interest he succeeded in getting up over plantation matters. He was in the saddle nearly all the time, either superintending the repairs on cabins, on fencing about the place, or watching with placid interest the careful process of cutting the cotton out to a stand.

Mrs. Stanhope and the girls led as lonely a life as over in the hills, but Eustis, kindly regardful for the pleasure of the orphans, so far as it was in his power to give them any, kept a riding horse for their especial

use, and insisted that each one of them should exercise on it every day.

"You in the morning, Virginia," he had said, settling things in a masterful way that was quite natural with him, "because that is Olga's busy time, and she in the afternoon."

This had come to be the regular order of things, and accounts for the fact that Virginia and Mrs. Stanhope were quite alone in the house on a certain afternoon when one of those sudden thunder storms, which come in that latitude as a perpetual surprise bursting in upon the mild serenity of May, swept over the face of the earth.

"Oh! it frightens me so," Virginia moaned, sinking in abject physical terror upon her knees by the blind woman, and burying her head in the folds of Mrs. Stanhope's dress to deaden the awful reverberations of the thunder, which, beginning in far off mutterings, came nearer and nearer until it burst with the roar of a fierce cannonading immediately over and about the unsheltered cottage.

Mrs. Stanhope laid her hands ungently on the cowering girl's shoulders. In her impatient anxiety she shook them slightly:

"Do come out of yourself for once, Virginia. Remember how helpless I am even to see this storm that makes you tremble so. Tell me how the sky looks! Tell me which way the wind blows! I am thinking of

the crops! Eustis is so proud of his! Take the field-glass and tell me if you can see any thing of him! Look toward the long-pond field! If he is out there near that deadening there's no house for him to shelter under, and there is danger there indeed!"

"What danger?" says Virginia, spurred by her anxiety for Eustis into springing to the rack in the hall where the field-glass hung and bringing it to bear on the long-pond field. "I see nothing," she said finally, dropping her tired arm by her side, "at least nothing of him. What danger threatens him more than us?"

"There is danger in the deadening from the falling of limbs! how the wind slams those shutters! Can't some one fasten them back?" Mrs. Stanhope's voice grew querulous from nervousness.

"There is no one here but me," says Virginia, "and I can not. Oh!" A vivid flash of lightning once more sent her cowering to Mrs. Stanhope's side. "It is fearful! absolutely terrific."

"Where is Olga? Why is she not here? She is worth a dozen of you, Virginia, when one wants help! Those slamming shutters are torturing me! Look again and see if you can see Eustis! He must be coming."

A temporary lull in the uproar of wind and thunder lent Virginia a moment of nerve. Once more raising the glass to her eyes she swept the broad acres of young cotton and corn that lay between the house and the deadening where Eustis was superintending the build-

ing of a new fence. So sharp a contrast between Olga's usefulness and her own helplessness had never been drawn by their benefactress before. It stung Virginia to the quick, and she answered with sullen resentment:

"I don't see any thing of your son! No doubt he is taking care of himself and Olga too, somewhere! I don't suppose either one of them is thinking or caring whether we are frightened to death or not! I don't see any thing but great banks of black clouds with ragged green edges rushing across the sky, and the trees are bending like whip-cords before the wind, and the hands are all scampering back to the quarters as fast as mules and legs can carry them, and—oh!" the glass fell to the ground, as she clasped her hands over her eyes and moaned plaintively, "you may be thankful you are blind so you can not see this awful lightning. Oh! dear Mrs. Stanhope, do you suppose the lightning will strike this house? Oh! did you ever, ever, hear such thunder before? Oh! I wish we were back over in the hills. This little house can be blown away so easily. I know it will go at the next gust."

Her selfish moaning was drowned in the awful uproar of the storm! Peal after peal of thunder mingled with the crackling sound of breaking tree limbs and the loose flapping and banging of every shutter about the house! Soon the fierce rattling of heavy hail-stones and the swirl of pouring rain, dashed against the weather-

boarding of the house by the driving wind, made the elemental uproar complete, while the flashing lightning darted into every crevice of the house in demoniacal mockery of the pallid girl who had no thought for any one but herself at that awful moment. Mrs. Stanhope had none for any one but Eustis. Olga, unselfish Olga, whose life was being spent in gentle ministration on the one and sisterly guardianship of the other of these two women, was for the time being completely forgotten. That insolent suggestion of Virginia's that Eustis was taking care of himself and Olga too, somewhere, Mrs. Stanhope laid aside for the text of a future lecture for the petulant girl, who was now too badly frightened to be manageable in any way. But suppose a germ of truth was hidden away in it?

"Take the glass again, Virginia! My son must be coming by this time! He said he was going to the deadening, and there is no house for him to shelter in. Look well, girl!"

"I couldn't see a regiment of horsemen," says Virginia querulously, adjusting the glass again, "through this white sheet of rain and hail! Mercy! It cuts the corn into ribbons; and the cotton fields look as if a stalk of cotton had never been planted in them. The ground is white with hail-stones! There! I hear the clatter of hoofs! That is Prince! I know the sound of his tramping! Your son is safe! I hear the slamming of the back gate."

"Quick, put down the glass and have some dry clothes for him by the time he gets to the house. It will kill him! Oh! my reckless boy!" as Eustis, stamping the rain from his soaked feet, presently called to her cheerily from the hall—

"Can't come any closer, mother, am as wet as a soaked sponge! I thought you would be worrying over the deadening or I wouldn't have tried to get back to the house! Pretty fierce storm! Don't think I ever saw a worse. I wish you'd send Olga to mix me something hot—"

"Olga has not gotten in from her ride yet," says Mrs. Stanhope, interrupting him placidly. Now that he was safe very little else mattered. "But there are so many cabins for her to take shelter in that I haven't worried about her in the least."

But Eustis did not take so complaisant a view of the girl's exposure to the storm he had just braved not without risk.

"Not in yet!" he said, seizing the glass which Virginia had left on a chair and sweeping the storm-rent landscape with an anxious gaze, "why she should have been home before the storm began! Do you know what time it is, mother? It's almost dark!"

"It is always dark with me, son!"

But the familiar plaint passed unnoticed this time. Not that Eustis had, or ever could grow indifferent to this affliction that enveloped himself and his mother in

a dark cloud of awful permanence, but just then he was thinking only of Olga. Slight of form, delicately molded child that she was, suppose she should have been caught out in this storm as he had been, where would she take shelter? And then the terror of it to her!

"Virginia," he said, as she reappeared bringing with her the cup of hot lemonade she was proud of having thought of unaided, "do you know which way Olga rode this afternoon?"

"I heard her say she was going to ride over to Mrs. Trowbridge's. Mrs. Trowbridge promised her, the other day, when she was here, to give her some bronze turkey eggs and Ollie said she wanted to go for them herself so they shouldn't be shaken too much. She's going to try to raise turkeys, you know."

"Hang the turkey eggs! What time did she start?"

"Immediately after dinner," says Virginia, with a pout, as she placed the unnoticed lemonade on a stand and sulkily left the room.

"Then," says Eustis, more as if he were comforting himself than addressing any one else, "she must be at Bendemma," and laying the field-glass aside he swallowed the hot lemonade at a few gulps and went off to his room to get on some dry clothes.

The storm was rapidly abating now, and with it Virginia's fears. Hearing Mr. Stanhope's door close somewhat noisily she went back to the sitting-room and began

adjusting things rather petulantly. Mrs. Stanhope sat with her hands folded over her knitting. It was always a sign of mental disturbance with her when the busy click-clack of her needles ceased. The clock on the mantle struck six, and no sign of Olga yet!

The raging of the storm, and her previous anxiety about Eustis, and Virginia's disrespectful coupling of Olga's name with her son's, and a certain nervous irritability that had seized upon her over the young man's anxiety for Olga's safety, all combined to make Mrs. Stanhope her harshest and most unjust self for the space of a few moments:

"Virginia," she said, "stop your restless prowling around the room and sit down. I have something to say to you."

Virginia dropped into a chair by her side wordlessly.

"If you knew that Olga had ridden over to Mrs. Trowbridge's for turkey eggs, why did you say you supposed my son was taking care of her and himself during the storm?"

"Because," said the girl daringly, "I thought he liked her well enough to see that no harm came to her in the storm. I'm sure he does like Ollie very much. And I don't see why he shouldn't. You've no idea how handsome she is growing to be. She's quite a young lady you know now. Why I feel like a silly child yet, Ollie is so much taller and

straighter and handsomer. And I heard Mr. Stanhope tell Mr. Trowbridge, that a better or sweeter girl did not live."

Mrs. Stanhope winced. She had asked her question with a view of leading quietly up to a lecture on the proprieties, which she felt that Virginia very much needed. She had been answered more fully than she cared to be. Virginia's pretty face wore an expression of mingled dissatisfaction and triumph. No compunction for the stab she had purposely inflicted disturbed her narrow soul. All the old time affection for Olga was rapidly merging into fierce jealousy for the girl who was out-stripping her in every point, even winning from her the palm of beauty that she had felt so securely her own.

"Olga is a very good girl,' says Mrs. Stanhope icily. She must show this presuming child how wide a gulf lay between her son and the orphans she had taken in hand for sweet charity's sake. "Doubtless, my son was trying to interest Mr. Trowbridge in her. I heard Mrs. Trowbridge say that she intended to employ an assistant about the house this year, more for the sake of companionship than for any special need. Doubtless Mr. Stanhope will secure the place for Olga."

"Why, what on earth would you do without Ollie?" Virginia asks, completely aghast at the prospect of having the prop she had so long leaned on herself suddenly taken away.

"You will have to learn to take her place," says Mrs. Stanhope, in her most imperative manner. "You know I only took Olga to humor a childish whim of yours, and I can not but think I have done enough for her, and for you too, to entitle me to some gratitude on her part and some effort on yours."

"Indeed! indeed! but you have," says Virginia, sinking into a chair close by the blind woman, to cover her passive hand with kisses.

"Olga not in yet?"

It was Eustis's voice ringing with anxiety that broke in upon this pretty tableau. It was quite dark now, and if Olga had been there the lamps would have been lighted in every part of the house.

"Not in yet," said Mrs. Stanhope. "I've no doubt Mrs. Trowbridge will keep her all night. It is kind of you to be so concerned about her, though."

"But there's no certainty she is with Mrs. Trowbridge. Virginia, will you hurry up supper while I tell Gus to saddle Prince again."

"What are you going to do, Eustis?" Mrs. Stanhope's voice was sharp with resentment.

"I am going to look for Olga," he said, then turned quickly on his heel and the two women heard him sending an imperative demand out toward the stable for Gus to saddle and bring his horse to him promptly.

"You know, mother," he said, coming back to the sitting-room, "that Olga is entirely too conscientious to

stay away all night from you without sending a message of some sort. I could not sleep to-night without satisfying myself that no harm had come to her. I only marvel at your and Virginia's indifference."

"As for me!" says Virginia sulkily, "I've got confidence enough in Ollie to believe she knows how to keep out of the rain. There never was a girl who had her wits always about her more completely than Olga. There! thank goodness!" she started suddenly to her feet.

"For what?"

"Don't you hear Shep barking? He was with her! He's barking for somebody to open the gate."

Eustis hurried out to the back gallery. Virginia followed him. They could hear the horse's feet slopping lazily along the rain-soaked road. It was a strangely slow gait for Olga to be coming at when it was so late that she must know they were all consumed with anxiety!

"Ollie!" Virginia sent her voice out toward the gate where the sounds had come to a stop. Some one was fumbling at the low-hung latch. No answer, only Shep's impatient sharp bark! Eustis sprang to the ground and reached the gate by a few impatient strides over the long wet grass. The rider was still fumbling nervously with the latch. He could just see the dark mass made by the horse and its rider.

"Olga, is that you?" he asked in a sharp voice.

"Yes, sir." The answer came to him in a slow soft voice, as if she had forced herself to make reply.

"Are you wet?" he asked, flinging wide the gate through which the horse passed briskly, of its own accord, Shep barking joyously at his heels. She did not answer. Gus came promptly to take the horse. Eustis reached up his arms to take her from the saddle. She moaned and drew back.

"Don't touch me! Don't touch me, please!"

But he seized her in his strong arms and placed her on the gallery by Ginia's side. He felt her slight form quiver in his clasp. She pushed rapidly by Virginia and ran rather than walked into the hall, only to come to a dead halt in the middle of it, where a table stood and on it an unshaded lamp. She began pulling off her gauntlets slowly and laboriously, finger by finger, although they were loose enough to have been shaken off without an effort. Eustis and Virginia following her, were at a loss to account for her actions or her appearance. She was as white as the plastered walls of the hall. Every movement was as unlike Olga as was possible. That she had not been exposed to the storm was evident, for beyond the spattering of mud on the end of her long skirt, she was as neat and trim of attire as when she had left the house in her most joyous mood some hours before. Eustis's mental conclusion was that she had received a severe nervous shock during the terrific storm that had just spent itself.

Her eyes were dropped to the gloves she was tugging at. The long dark lashes of her lids lay like silken fringe on her white cheeks.

"Where are the turkey eggs, Ollie?" Virginia asked, more as it were to break the girl's strange silence than for any desire to know.

Olga raised her eyes and looked into the laughing face before her. Its bright gayety seemed to hurt her. Her lips quivered for a second, then closed resolutely. No words came from them.

"Olga!" said Eustis, taking the riding whip from her trembling grasp and compelling her to look up at him as he laid a detaining hand on her shoulder, "what is the matter with you, child? You look as if something terrible had happened since you left the house."

"Something terrible has happened," said the girl slowly, "but it is not any thing that concerns any body but myself." Great tears stood in the soft eyes that were raised to Eustis's face. For a moment he felt a mighty impulse to stoop and kiss them away. What if the lovely eyes did belong to his mother's charity girl? What if the girl standing there burdened with some strange grief that she was bravely striving to keep all to herself, was Olga nameless and "set apart," as his mother always mysteriously said of her. She was young and innocent and suffering. And so lovely in her grief. He spoke with infinite gentleness.

"What concerns you concerns your friends, little

Olga. Come, get her a cup of tea, Virginia, and then we will talk about this trouble, whatever it is, with mother."

"Not to-night. Oh! not to-night, please."

Mrs. Stanhope's patience was exhausted by this time. That Olga had returned and not come to report penitently to her immediately was very irritating in view of all that had gone before that evening. She called out querulously from the sitting-room,

"Olga! Is it your intention to keep the household waiting on you all night? Have you not made yourself of importance enough for one occasion?"

Olga glided into her presence, and kneeling down by her side said in a voice too low for any ear but Mrs. Stanhope's:

"Be patient with me to-night, dear lady! To-morrow I will go away from you and never be of any importance to any one again. For oh! Mrs. Stanhope, I have found out who I am! I know who my mother is! God help me, I know who and what I am! Don't tell them to-night. Don't tell Ginia. To-morrow I will be stronger. To-morrow I can bear it better."

For a moment she kneeled there clinging convulsively to the hand of the woman who had rescued her from an asylum to which, in the new misery that had come upon her, she looked back as upon a lost haven of rest and security. With the suddenness and the desolation of the storm that had just spent its fury on the earth,

Olga's life had been darkened, and the future spread out before her like a rugged thorn-strewn path leading by strange and devious ways—whitherward she did not know.

Mrs. Stanhope was completely bewildered at the turn events had taken! Had she dared hope it possible, she would have wished that this knowledge could come to the girl through some agency other than herself. But now that it had come, and the innocent sufferer for the sins of others was bending and quivering under the blow like a storm-shaken reed, Eustis's mother was pure womanly in her pity. She laid her hand on the girl's bowed head:

"My poor child! From my heart I pity you! Go to your room now and to-morrow we will talk the matter over calmly."

"Calmly!" Olga repeated the word with bitter emphasis as she rose obediently to her feet. "Will it ever be possible for me to talk of it calmly?" Then with outstretched hands covering her face she sped quickly past Mrs. Stanhope, across the narrow hall and into her own room, which she locked against all intruders for the night, leaving Mrs. Stanhope relieved but pitiful, Virginia consumed with curiosity, and Eustis grieving for the grief that had shown so plainly in every line of the girl's pure sweet face. For it was a face that Eustis loved.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OLD DORA'S CURSE!

THIS is what had happened to Olga, shutting out the sunshine of peace and joy from her young heart so suddenly and so utterly that in her despair she called it—forever!

Riding blithely through the woods alone, her whole being expanding with a sense of physical refreshment, her heart expanded too in a burst of gratitude to the Author of so much loveliness and brightness and fragrance. God was very good, and the world was very beautiful, and she was very happy! That was all her creed. The strip of wood-land that lay between the Bendemma and Hardlines plantations was Olga's special delight. Here the pleasant fragrance of the sweet gum trees was strongest, and the showers of the dog-wood blossoms whitest; and the low-growing may apple the thickest; and the bright eyed squirrels most fearless in their lightsome gambols, and the birds in the branches overhead most rollicking in their carnival of song; and here Olga loved best to give the rein to the gentle little animal she sat with such easy grace while, as she her-

self expressed it to Ginia, "She thought and thought and thought."

Such pure tender fancies fresh from a pure tender heart in which was no guile. Fancies into which were distilled all the fragrance and the brightness and the music that went to make up the glory of that May afternoon as Olga felt and saw it in the Bendemma woods.

With a sense of utter freedom from restraint she rode along trying to mimic, in a girlish whistle, the swift changing notes of a mocking-bird that was announcing his connubial satisfaction in a newly acquired mate in the most ecstatic measures. She knew the road to Bendemma quite well, though, heretofore, she had only gone over it in the carriage with Mrs. Stanhope. She and quiet Mrs. Trowbridge were the best of friends, and she quite rejoiced to think that the days were getting so long now, that she could ride over any afternoon and back home before dark. Mrs. Trowbridge "knew so much" and she was so willing to impart her useful knowledge for Olga's benefit, and as fate seemed to be settling it for her, that she was to be Mrs. Stanhope's housekeeper, she wanted to become a very good one indeed. She didn't care in the least that the pony was pursuing rather a zig-zag route along the cool bridle-path, making erratic excursions to either side as the tempting shoots of sassafras or cane caught his big covetous eyes. From this leisurely progress she

was startled by a clap of thunder that made the pony utter a terrified snort, then stand quivering with fright with his small ears pointed forward, hushed the song of the birds to a startled twittering, as the little singers fluttered tremulously from limb to limb seeking the densest foliage, and made Olga herself tighten her hold upon the bridle apprehensively. Shut in by the tall forest trees from a view of the overcast sky, she had not noticed the swift scudding storm-clouds, but now when the huge limbs began to sway and creak ominously about her and above her, she applied the whip vigorously to the pony's flanks, bent on gaining the shelter of the first roof she could find.

The first roof that came in sight belonged to old Dora's cabin. It was brought suddenly into view as the pony cantered briskly from under the swaying and moaning branches of the trees. Nothing doubting of her welcome, Olga lifted the latch and rode swiftly up to the cabin door. The sound of a snarling contest between her own dog and Shep, who, by reason of being white folks' dog, was rather arrogant in his demands for hospitality, brought old Dora hobbling slowly toward the entrance from the dark interior of the cabin, whose wooden shutters she had drawn close in anticipation of the fast-coming storm.

"Aunty!" said Olga, already out of the saddle and holding the restive pony by the bridle-rein, "can I stay here with you until the storm is over?"

"Cert'n sho, little mistiss! but how you gwine git yo' saddle tuk'n off? Dar ain' nary blessed soul twix' dis en de quarters 'cept me, and I ain' no mo' 'count den a dead womin sence I cotch col' de odder day a-helpin' Reube to sot out de sweet-tater slips, en I'se got sech a mis'ry in my back det seems lak I was 'bout to broke in two wid it. But folks can't last f'rever"—

"Oh! I can manage about the saddle well enough," says Olga, breaking in upon what promised to be an endless exposition of Dora's ailments, "if you'll just hold the bridle for me, aunty, so the restless little rogue shan't jump away from me when I get the saddle half off."

So Dora hobbled a little closer and took the bridle in hand, while Olga kneeled down on the gallery floor and tugged valiantly at the stubborn buckles and unyielding straps, and Shep sniffed around her reproaching her for so debasing herself, and the pony sighed impatiently for the freedom of Dora's not very expansive grounds.

"There is nothing he can hurt, is there?" Olga asked of her hostess, as, with a whinny of delight and a defiant outward fling of a pair of very active hind legs, the pony careered madly around the little inclosure for a few moments before settling down to the more serious business of grazing on the scattered tufts of wiry crab-grass that had, by a miracle of vitality, survived the trampling of many feet in Dora's yard.

"He's welcome t'all he kin git out'n dat yard," says

Dora, with large liberality, as she turned to lead the way back into the cabin. Olga followed her, dragging the saddle safely out of reach of the big rain-drops that were already falling fast and thick. Dusting the best chair in the cabin carefully with her apron, Dora offered it to her guest with old-time courtesy.

"Take a seat en sot down, missy. Ain' good 'nough for de likes uv you, but it's de bes' I'se got now. It's at yo' service. I don' see de quality folks now, sence I done got ole en cripple up lik' wid de mis'ry in my back, but I use to live wid w'ite folks. W'ite folks use t' think mo' uv ole Dora den dey do dese days. I knows w'at de quality is like. I ain' forgot ev'y thing I eva knowed. No ma'am, I ain't dat."

Olga located the chair close by the cabin door. It was dark and uninviting inside! Squalid in its poverty, untidy in its keeping. Great strings of red peppers and dried okra and parti-colored pop-corn ornamented the smoked rafters! Bunches of broom corn and dusty wood-cuts from pictorial papers covered the rough white-washed walls; a rickety table piled high with the unwashed dishes of several meals, leaned helplessly against the wall; a dull fire slumbered in the big hearth; there was nothing pleasing to distract attention from the storm without. On the unceiled roof the heavy rain fell loudly and harshly. It was a shelter from the storm, but nothing more. Olga felt sorry for human beings condemned to spend all their days

in such an unlovely atmosphere. She turned her pitying eyes on the shriveled face of her hostess. "You don't live here all by yourself, aunty?"

"No! I'se got folks," says Dora proudly. "My ole man Reubin, he's plantin' in de gin-slough fiel' dis year, an' he's got a ve'y good squad, he is! En my gal Rose she's turned in t' help him out wid de cuttin' uv de crops out t' a stan'. But Rose ain' no fiel' hand. Rose never wos no fiel' han'. I 'spec' dey done stop in out'n de rain at de gin. It's too fur t' git home. Does you live anywhere clost 'bout here, honey? Seems lak I can't jus' zackly place you. My mem'ry narves ain' in good workin' order."

"I live at the Hardlines plantation when I am on this side of the river," says Olga, too accustomed to the simple curiosity of the whole negro race to resent the catechising she knew Dora was preparing for her.

"An' whar at w'en you's on tudder side, honey?"

"At Stanhope Hall, over in Mississippi."

"You know ole lady Stanhope?"

"Oh, yes, I live with her."

"An' Mr. Eustis?"

"Oh! yes."

"You ain' no kin to 'em doa, is you? I done know all 'bout de Hardlines w'ite folks mos' as good as I know my own w'ite folks, en seems lak I hear ole Miss Stanhope did'n' have nothin' lef' but dat boy o' hern,

Eustis. How de ole lady stan' de w'ar and t'ar er time enny way? How she lookin'?"

"She is looking very well," says Olga, "she is very handsome I think, aunty."

"An' Miss Denton? you know Miss Denton? she's aunt to my w'ite folks down yon' at Bendemma, de Trowbridges."

"Yes, I know Miss Denton, too," says Olga leniently smiling on the eager questioner, to whom these bald items furnished such rich entertainment.

"Den," says old Dora, coming a little closer and leaning heavily on her stick, while she placidly examined the texture of Olga's riding skirt over her spectacles, "ef you knows Miss Denton, I 'lows you knows my gal Rose too. My gal Rose, she's been doin' fur Miss Denton 'bout de house. Rose ain' no fiel' han', she never was. My gal Rose was cut out for a leddy."

Olga admitted that she knew Miss Denton's Rose.

"W'at's yo' entitle, honey?" Dora asked, placidly extending one hand to feel the texture of her habit.

"My name is Olga." The young girl grew restive under this prolonged questioning, and gathering her long skirt under her arm, she stepped out on the gallery and walked to its northern end to see what was the prospect for clearing up. The rain still poured pitilessly. When she came back, Dora had drawn a short dingy bench close up to the chair she had been sitting in and was now sending volumes of smoke roof-ward

from a stubby pipe over whose stem she mumbled a question she had in readiness.

"Was you borned over t' Stanhope Hall, honey?"

"No."

"Mebbe at Hardlines, den."

"I was born in Cleveland," says Olga desperately, hoping by settling the point of her nativity to escape further catechising. But no sooner did the word Cleveland fall on Dora's ears than it produced a startling effect. It was as if she had been suddenly shaken into mental activity. Her black eyes twinkled ominously.

"Cleveland," she muttered, "Cleveland! whar's Cleveland, honey?" Then, without waiting for any answer. "Cleveland! Dat's the ve'y place whar my gal Rose done tuk an leff' her little gal in de 'sylum! An' bless de lam', it's all comin' as cl'ar to my vishun es Jacob's ladder were t' him! Dat's de ve'y place whar she done tol' me old lady Stanhope tuk en tuk her gal en made a lady uv her, en fotch her down here t' live! She did, 'fore de lam'! an' here's me bin sittin' here all dis time right 'long side uv my gal Rose's gal an did'n have no better sense." Dora leaned back on her bench and laughed in an imbecile fashion.

Olga looked at her in affright! What was it that this hideous old crone was saying? why was the old creature leering at her and chuckling to herself in that senseless fashion? She felt every drop of blood forsaking her cheeks and settling as it seemed in a full choking

flood about her heart. What had she to do with this old hag's daughter's daughter? What was it to her that she had been in a Cleveland asylum? What was it to her that she knew nothing of her father and mother? How dared any one say that the same blood mingled in her veins and in the veins of that withered negress, laughing in imbecile enjoyment of her own supposed discovery! But deeper than her indignation, more profound than her disgust, was the under-current of the sickening possibility that it might be true! Her teeth chattered so that she could not frame the wild protest in her heart into words, words that she wanted to hurl at this old hag's head to crush her with her wrath. She shivered as with cold.

"Let granny stir up de fire, honey. You's rale col'. I sees de shivers passin' over you. Sho' you is got yo' daddy's eyes!"

"Don't call yourself granny to me!" Olga cried, finding voice at last. "How dare you speak so to me? I'm not your daughter's daughter! I'm not! I'm not! I'm not! You are a wicked crazy old negro woman and you don't know what you are saying! You are crazy, just as crazy as you can be, and Mr. Trowbridge ought to have you shut up! You are a wicked old woman! I'll try to be sorry for you and to forgive you when I get over my angry feelings, but I don't feel sorry for you now, no, not one bit. I wish I hadn't asked for shelter from the rain. I didn't know a crazy

woman lived here or I wouldn't. Don't look at me. Don't dare speak to me again!"

She had not meant to excite the old woman's wrath! She had not meant any thing, connectedly. She had simply let fall from her quivering lips the only words that seemed in any measure to meet the emergency. But Dora rose to the full extent of her towering form, and raising her long muscular arms far above her turbaned head (from out which a multitude of tightly plaited and twine wrapped tufts of grizzled hair protruded like snake-heads) clasped her palsied hands about each other and cried shrilly in a voice quavering with passion:

"De God uv Ab'm, Isik en Jacob punish her! De God dat visits de onnatural, en de wicked, en de thankliss chile, punish her! De Master, w'at made de b'ars, de she b'ars, consume de sinful chill'n uv old, punish her! Po' down de vials uv wrath on her!"

The fierce earnestness of this imprecation rescued it from every touch of the ludicrous! The hands that had been upraised in cursing, fell nervelessly to her sides. Old Dora sank slowly upon the bench and fastened her blood-shotten eyes on the pallid face of the girl before her. A fierce flash of lightning blazed into every crevice of the dark cabin, followed closely by an awful peal of thunder that shook the very foundations of the house. The dogs lifted up their voices in a dismal duet! It was as if all the powers of evil had been

turned loose to crush one helpless child! Olga shuddered and clasped her hands over her face more to shut out the baleful glitter of the eyes so close to her own, than in fear of the blinding lightning that rent the black clouds in twain every second or two. Old Dora's voice was raised to drown the uproar of the storm :

" I'se got mo' ways uv settlin' wid folks den one! You'll 'member dese words uv mine 'fo ' you many days older! I 'lows my Rose is got a right t' her own chile, en ef she's too big a fool to stan' up fur her own rights, I'se got to stan' up fur her, dat's all. You may fight ag'in it es much es you please. En ders udders dat'll fight ag'in it, too. But I'se got mo' ways uv settlin' wid folks den one! W'en de piller, under yo' sassy head won' let sleep come a-nigh you! w'en de vittles dat you swallers, sickin's en chokes you! w'en de flesh draps from yo' bones en yo' days is days uv weariness! w'en ev'y thing you loves turns t' hatin uv you! w'en de flowers dat you plants turns t' thorns en pricks yo' fingers! w'en de sun turns black befo' you eyes en ders blood upon de moon! w'en de storm-rack hides de starlight from you! w'en de screech-owl perchis on yo' window sill, en laughs because you's cryin'! w'en yo' eyelids drop wid heaviness en yo' feet 'fuses to carry you 'long! don't say ole Dora conjure you, only 'member w'at she say t' you in dis hour w'en 'you deny de mammy dat bore de pains uv chile-bed fur you! Dora's got mo' ways of settlin' wid folks den one."

She stopped speaking! The sound of her slow labored breathing mingled with the sighing of the wind and the pelting of the rain on the unceiled roof and the muttering of the thunder that was rolling further and further off on its mission of terror and destruction. The storm seemed to Olga's fancy part and parcel of a hideous dream that she was in bondage to. She would wake up presently, and ride back home to Hardlines, through the bright sweet woods that she had passed over so blithely a little while ago! The sun would shine again, and the birds would sing, and the dog-wood would shed its snowy petals on her head again, as she shook the low hanging branches with her riding whip, and the squirrels would scamper before her, and she would whistle back at the mocking birds and forget all about this strange old hag and her hideous story!

But when, after awhile, the rain ceased falling and the tired winds fell asleep in the tree tops, and the voice of the thunder was silenced, she stole from the cabin, and buckling the saddle on once more with cold trembling fingers, she mounted and rode away from the cabin without a word or look for the old woman who, her wrath spent, now cowered in terror of Rose's dire malediction when she should discover what had been done. There was no sunshine to gild her backward ride through the somber woods! The dog-wood blossoms lay soiled and spent before the pitiless blast!

The birds cowered chilled and voiceless in their storm-beaten coverts! Frogs croaked from the swollen ponds! Myriad bats low-flying flapped their wings heavily near her cold white cheeks! The hoot of a distant owl sounded dismally close in the silent air! All things bright and fair and sweet had faded as if touched by the hand of an evil Magi! And old Dora's was the blighting touch.

CHAPTER XIX.

COMFORTED.

WHEN Olga came out of her room the next morning she closed the door softly after her, as one does who comes out from the presence of the dead, and stood motionless quite a while, with her hand resting on the knob of it. She knew it was late, and she felt grateful to Mrs. Stanhope for leaving her undisturbed so long. Virginia had sent a smothered summons to breakfast through the closed door ever so long ago, but she had felt privileged for this once to indulge herself to the utmost, and had disregarded the voice. Sorrow has its prerogatives, and grief is pardonable for its egotism. The house was very still. It was as if all things lay quiet from exhaustion after the uproar and the destruction of the day before. The sun was smiling radiantly down upon the desolated fields of corn and cotton which had been the pride and boast of the place just twenty-four short hours ago. How heartless it looked! She could see, through the open front door, panels of fencing lying prone! And over yonder, where the woods crowded close upon the cultivated land, wide spaces, where the dazzling blue sky shone instead of the bosky green of crowded trees,

showed how fiercely the storm-king had worked his will in that direction.

The birds, those true philosophers who live for the present only, warbled joyously from every tree branch, forgetful of the past terrors that had sent them cowering to their leafy coverts, careless of future possibilities, reveling in the consciousness that the Now was altogether good and bright. How heartless they sounded! The sitting-room door, just opposite to where she stood, spell-bound and irresolute, was closed; but she could hear the droning, monotonous tones of Ginia's voice, as she read aloud to Mrs. Stanhope, with no pause, no interruptions for breath or comment. Things were going on beyond that closed door just as usual! Perhaps they had missed her a trifle at the breakfast-table, where she usually presided at the tea-tray, but who was thinking of her dead that lay behind her in the room she had just closed? Her dead youth? her dead innocence? her dead hopes? She had put them all away from her, with tears and moans that had broken over her and shaken her as the storm had broken over and shaken old Dora's cabin. She seemed to feel herself a new-born child of that storm. All the old conditions of her life were done away with forever. How strange it all seemed! She could see Eustis pacing moodily up and down the long front gallery, with his hat drawn well down over his brow and his hands clasped behind him. Doubtless he was thinking of his despoiled

fields and his marred prospects! Doubtless he regarded himself as a very unfortunate creature, and really felt wrecked as he looked out on the corn, lashed into ribbons, and the promising cotton crop wiped entirely from existence. His troubles excited a wan smile of pity. She looked down upon him from the supreme altitude of her greater woe! How insignificant it all seemed! Shep, clumsy, affectionate, loyal, bounding up the front steps with a view of paying his respects to his master, caught a glimpse of Olga at the far end of the hall, and, with a joyous bark, swerved from Eustis's outstretched hand, scampering through the hall with muddy, shaggy feet to seek the caresses he loved best on earth. Eustis glanced up! How pale the child looked! He followed Shep's lead, and went in to her. Something had troubled her. He did not know what, but he wanted her to understand that he did not regard her as simply a convenience in his mother's house. He held out his hand, saying kindly: "Well, my little girl!"

Olga did not notice the extended hand. Her troubled eyes rested on his face for a fleet second, then she stooped to caress Shep with eager hands. Shep would never know any difference! "I am so sorry about your crop," she said, with a smile more pitiful than tears, then brushed hastily past him and went in where Ginia was still reading aloud to Mrs. Stanhope.

Eustis stood for a second where she had left him, puzzling over her strange conduct. Her usual gentle courtesy had given place to abrupt discourtesy. The serenity of her countenance, which was its greatest charm, was broken up into stormy unrest. Whatever had happened to the girl, it must be of a very serious nature, and it was his duty to inquire further into it. As long as she remained with his mother, she was virtually under his protection. The door of the sitting-room opened abruptly and closed harshly. Virginia had come out from it, and now crossed the hall with a very petulant look on her pretty face. Her curiosity was piqued and foiled. "What is the matter with Olga, Virginia?" Eustis asked abruptly, as she was sweeping past him.

"I haven't the remotest idea. Whatever it is, she's determined to make a very imposing mystery out of it."

Eustis turned on his heel and walked back toward the gallery. There were no crops to ride over this morning. Shep placed himself at his heels, and man and dog soberly paced the long gallery to and fro.

Something strange had happened to Olga at the moment of her entering the sitting-room, where Virginia was reading a chapter from the New Testament, to their benefactress, as she did every morning. She would wait until the chapter was finished, and then ask Ginia to leave her alone with Mrs. Stanhope. These

were the words that came to her as she stopped quietly just behind the old lady's chair :—" My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." It was not the end of the chapter. Ginia's voice droned on through four more verses, but Olga heard no more.

Those words alone abode with her. It was as if a heavenly messenger had descended to bring them to her for her solace and comfort, in this the hour of her sore need. Involuntarily she raised her down-cast head. With Christ on her side, why should she fear what man could do unto her ! How sweet and strong and self-poised she looked, standing there waiting for the reading to come to an end!

"Isn't Olga here?" Mrs. Stanhope asked almost before the book was closed. Olga answered for herself.

"Yes, ma'am; and I am going to ask Ginia to go away and let me talk with you alone."

"Go, Virginia," was all Mrs. Stanhope said, and it was this curt dismissal that clouded Ginia's bright face. She was used to such extraordinary consideration from Mrs. Stanhope, who had to-day been positively affectionate toward her, that she was in a fair way to become exacting.

[If Virginia had known that Mrs. Stanhope's access of warmth was due to the fact, that, in her relief at knowing that Olga had learned, without any breach of

confidence on her own part, what she so much desired her to know, she would have felt less flattered by it.]

Mrs. Stanhope held herself in readiness now to receive Olga's communication with mingled feelings of relief and regret. The girl was forever out of Eustis's way at last, and, although she had never for long entertained the idea that a Stanhope could so far forget himself as to fall in love with a nameless charity girl, she had felt Olga's beauty and refinement to be a snare to her boy's feet. Now she could still avail herself of the girl's usefulness without fearing her charms. Let Eustis once know that a drop of tainted blood throbbed under Olga's pure olive skin, and an impassable gulf was fixed between them forever. And yet she was not without womanly pity for this innocent sufferer for the sins of others. Let her who is without selfishness among you, cast the first stone.

Olga took possession of the hassock vacated by Virginia, and went to the point with simple directness. Directness was one of her most fixed attributes. She was incapable of circumlocution in any matter.

"Mrs. Stanhope, when you took me out of the asylum at Cleveland, did you have any idea at all about my parentage?"

Mrs. Stanhope answered with an evasiveness that was in strong contrast to the child's directness.

"Your parentage? Well, no, my poor Olga, that—is—not exactly."

"I don't understand you, Mrs. Stanhope."

The calm superiority of her voice and manner nettled Mrs. Stanhope unaccountably. She shifted her position in the arm-chair uneasily.

"I certainly had reason to suppose," she said cruelly, "that your blood was not of the purest," then, hastily defending herself, where no charge was brought, "but I have kept my promise to the letter. I have kept it in spite of every thing."

"What promise, Mrs. Stanhope? Who did you promise, and what?"

Olga leaned forward on the hassock with an eager light in her mournful eyes. How much more of her life's mystery might be stored away in that impassive breast. Perhaps the revelation of a father might be added to the revelation of a mother! Did the future hold any greater shame for her?

"My promise to Amelia Dana," said Mrs. Stanhope, rather shocked to find herself actually standing on the defensive with Olga. "She extracted a foolish promise from me that I would never let you know there was any difference between you and Virginia."

"Why was it a foolish promise? I remember Mrs. Dana. She was the lady with white hair and blue eyes that always made me think of the angels. She did not see any difference. What does the difference really consist in, Mrs. Stanhope?"

"It was a foolish promise," said Mrs. Stanhope, pur-

suing her own line of thought, "because you might then have grown up expecting things—to—" she hesitated, then concluded imperatively, "but I have allowed you to catechise me sufficiently. Tell me what you have learned, child, and then I shall be able the better to advise you."

So Olga told her, substantially, all that had passed in old Dora's cabin. Her voice from being low and intense, as if she were with an effort keeping herself well in hand, culminated in a sudden piercing plea as she sank on the floor by Mrs. Stanhope's chair, in an attitude of prayer.

"Tell me that she lied! oh! tell me that I am not the daughter of that poor slattern whom I found asleep in the woods that day! Tell me that there's not a word of truth in it, and how my soul will bless you! Oh! it will kill me!"

Her voice died away in passionate sobs, she sank still lower on the floor until her head rested on the hassock at the lady's feet. Mrs. Stanhope leaned over and guided by her moans laid a pitying hand on the bowed head:

"My poor little Olga. Poor innocent sufferer."

"Then it is true?" Olga had hushed her sobs at the first word.

"I am afraid it is. Poor child, poor child."

"But you should know whether it is true, and if it is true, Mrs. Stanhope, you should have left me where it's

being true would not have been enough to blight my whole life. I will not, I will not take the simple word of an imbecile old negress and let it fasten eternal disgrace on me."

When she was humble and abased Mrs. Stanhope pitied her, when her voice rang out so defiantly, the lady feared her.

"Calm yourself, Olga," she said, in her coldest voice, "there is scarcely any room for hope for you. There is too much circumstantial evidence as to your parentage for me to be able to doubt old Dora's word. This must have come like a terrible shock to you. I am very sorry for you and I am disposed to ameliorate matters for you as far as I possibly can. I shall always feel most kindly toward you. It is not necessary that this revelation should make any difference between you and me. I have known it, substantially, all along. I had purposed, on your eighteeenth birth-day, to offer you a permanent position as my paid housekeeper. I still offer you that position, though of course in view of old Dora's having allowed her tongue to wag, you are liable to be the subject of much covert gossip. I don't think the woman Rose is likely to annoy you—"

"Is the woman Rose my mother, do you think, Mrs. Stanhope?" Olga asked in a slow quiet way.

"I think there is hardly any doubt about it, child."

"Then," said Olga, getting up from her crouching

attitude, "it is hardly worth while for us to talk about plans, Mrs. Stanhope. I must think it out by myself. You will let me stay here until I can think up some plan, will you not, ma'am? I don't mean to stay as I have been, you know. Not to sit at the table with you and Mr. Eustis and Ginia, I mean just to shelter myself in the little back gallery room until my head gets clear enough for me to form a plan of some sort, that is—until I can think out my duty. I want to do just what I ought to do—for—every body's sake." Then the unnatural calm of face and voice broke up tempestuously once more, and with hands clasped over her streaming eyes she moaned again and again: "Why did you not leave me where I was? why, oh! why?"

"Olga," said Mrs. Stanhope sternly, "are you going to reproach me for the trouble that has come upon you? Reproach me after I have spent so many years preparing you to cope with life, better than you could ever have done when the asylum had done its best for you by putting you out at service?"

"Forgive me, dear Mrs Stanhope, it is so hard to be just to others when trouble goes over us like remorseless billows. I will come back to you when I know better what to say about my future."

Then, like some sorely wounded thing, she went slowly out from Mrs. Stanhope's presence and regained her own room, thankful that she encountered no one in the transit.

Shut in by herself she lost all consciousness of the lapse of time. Who was attending to her accustomed duties she neither knew, nor cared to know. She had stepped entirely out of the sphere of her old life, from the moment she had found it impossible to doubt that Dora had spoken the truth. The one thought now was to go very far away from them all, where no one would have the right to look at her pityingly. As immovable as a statue she sat on the side of the bed while the morning wore its way toward noon. She knew when twelve o'clock came by the ringing of the big bell in the quarter lot. She knew when two o'clock came by the ringing of the smaller house bell for dinner. A knock came to her door, such an imperative one, that she was obliged to show herself in response to it. Ginia stood there with a tray of food. She glanced with more curiosity than pity at Olga's swollen eyes.

"Mr. Eustis says you are to eat this, or he will be seriously angry." Olga reached out her hand for the tray obediently, drew it into the room and once more locked the door. Later on she heard the creaking sound of the hammock on the back gallery, one of its staples was fastened into the door-post of the room she sat in. She knew that Eustis was smoking his after dinner cigar out there. Presently the sound of somebody stamping mud off his feet, then scraping them on the hoe-blade that was nailed to the top step for the

purpose, came to her in her self-absorption. That was Mr. Trowbridge's voice clear and loud:

"Rode over to see how badly the storm had used you up. Pretty rough on you, my boy."

"It has ruined me!" she heard Eustis say in answer, and she smiled bitterly at his childish exaggeration.

Their voices came to her with distinctness through the unceiled walls of the gallery room. What they said was of no manner of interest to her; their speech ran on conveying nothing to her but a sense of sound, until one name started prominently from the flow of Mr. Trowbridge's talk—"Dora!" she heard him say, and then Eustis, in a voice that sounded shocked and surprised, "Not old Dora, Rose's mother?"

What were they talking about, those two men out there, bringing in the names that held such baleful significance for her? She strained her ears to catch the next words: "There is scarcely a doubt the poor old thing must have died from the effects of fright at the storm. There was no sign of her having been struck by lightning, nothing burned about her, or the house, but she was entirely alone in the storm, and from the position and general appearance of the body she must have died in extreme agony."

Mr. Trowbridge told the story in a voice of perfect indifference. Suddenly Olga's door opened and she stood before the two men as white as a wraith.

"Is old Dora, that lives in your woods, close there

by the gin, dead, Mr. Trowbridge?" she asked, with no word of greeting or apology for her intrusion.

Waring Trowbridge glanced at her in that restless way that always overtook him when Olga was the object in view.

"Yes, child, yes," he said quickly, "but what's come to you, Olga? Mrs. Trowbridge says she's had a lot of turkey eggs waiting for you for an age."

"Wasn't she there yesterday?" Eustis asked, glancing in surprise from Olga's agitated face to Mr. Trowbridge's.

"Not that I know of," said Mr. Trowbridge, "were you, Olga?"

But there was no visible Olga to hear or answer the question. She had disappeared as suddenly as she appeared, and was even then, poor little thing, hysterically congratulating herself that Dora, the one living witness to her disgrace (as she worded it), was suddenly and forever silenced. Who knew, perhaps now, she would be able to keep her terrible secret all to herself?

While outside Eustis was wonderingly and angrily revolving in his own mind the question: If Olga was not at Bendemma in the storm, where was she? fiercely resolving that the question should be answered by her own lips before she slept that night.

Not for long did Olga entertain the evil joy that filled her storm-tossed soul at the prospect of concealment afforded by Dora's death. The lessons she had

learned in the old asylum days, lessons of truth and honor, had sunk deep into the receptive soil of her ardent nature. She kneeled down by the bed-side and prayed to be forgiven for her unhallowed rejoicing over the death of old Dora. She kneeled still, long after her murmured prayer had died from lips and heart. Once again the words she had heard in the morning made themselves audible to her waiting soul: "My peace I give unto thee," and again: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid," and she was comforted.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GULF FIXED.

OLGA crept stealthily from her room that evening when she knew the family was gathered around the early tea-table, and stepping off the low gallery, found herself in the garden that skirted one side of the house. She wanted to walk down to the river-bank to get a breath of fresh air. She felt as if the atmosphere of the gallery room was thickened by her own tears and groans. She would not go through the hall to the front door. The sound of her foot-fall upon the hard oil-cloth that covered it, might betray her, and she would either be importuned by Ginia, or commanded by Mrs. Stanhope to take her place at the table. The lamp-light, from the dining-room, fell across the path she must take to reach the front gate. How comfortable and happy they all looked in there together! She could not see Eustis's face, for he sat with his back to her, but Virginia, behind the tea-tray there, in poor Ollie's own place, how pretty she looked in her blue muslin and tiny white apron! Flushed and a trifle nervous over her new responsibility of pouring out the tea

for the family, she sent little appealing glances for leniency across the table from a pair of the most dove-like eyes imaginable. Mr. Trowbridge had remained for supper, and must be entertaining them in his liveliest fashion, for even Mrs. Stanhope's somewhat austere features were wreathed in complacent smiles. Olga passed swiftly across the band of light that gave them to her vision. Could she look so happy and forgetful if ruin had just overtaken them? she asked herself bitterly, as she almost ran out of sight, fearful of uttering her moans audibly. As the iron latch of the front gate fell from her hand with a loud click, Shep, with the impetuosity of a belated tornado, swept through the open hallway and with a reproachful yelp bounded over the low-plank fence and followed in swift pursuit. As he reached her side, he touched her hand with his cold but friendly nose, then sobering his exuberant vitality to accord with her evident dejection, walked sedately on by her side, his huge paws making distinct impressions in the smooth sandy road that had been beaten into compact hardness by the storm of yesterday. Olga reached out a hand of welcoming to her shaggy comforter, and with it resting on his curly head walked silently on toward the river. She was thankful that the story of her parentage would never turn Shep's devotion into contempt, or make him the less eager to be her companion in walk or ride. "But they will take you away from me, old

friend," she said aloud, "when they go one way and I the other," and Shep answered with a loud clear bark that might mean gratitude for tardy notice taken, or might be his way of offering consolation. Who will presume to say? The road they were traveling was the wagon road that led through the cotton fields from the gin-house to the landing, where the steam-boats stopped to take on cotton or put off plantation supplies. There was no attraction in it at all. On either hand stretched the storm-ravished fields with which Olga felt herself in such close sympathy. Yesterday they were full of promise and young hope; to-day bare and desolate! The same storm had desolated her life and their promise! But at the end of this walk she would find the river. The great muddy resistless Mississippi River, rushing by on its mission to the sea. One of the few pastimes she and Virginia always enjoyed when they came over from the Hall in the hills was their rambles on the river bank picking up such articles of flotsam and jetsam as the rushing current left within their reach. But that was when the river was low and the flat sandy safe beach ran far out under the treacherous upper banks. The river was rising now, and only three feet of bluff bank was between her and the dark waters as she stood upon the brink with Shep motionless by her side. Great masses of drift-wood floated swiftly down stream. The long bodies of dead trees, black and unlovely, sped-by with the noiselessness of spirits of the

dark, hastening to their ocean caves. It was a somber outlook! No sign of the habitation of man, unless she should turn her gaze land-ward and look for it in points of light glimmering at far spaces apart, showing where the scattered negro cabins were located. But Olga did not turn her gaze land-ward, poor child, it was turned inward, so resolutely that she saw without seeing the tree-clothed banks opposite to her, where the thick crowding willows and cotton-woods growing down to the very water's edge, showed now in the dim light of the gloaming a black and formless mass against the cold gray sky. A ponderous sigh smote on her ears, followed by another and yet another in rhythmic succession. It was as if a giant, weary of toil, was slowly wending his way up the river. Such sighs could only come from giant lungs. Olga shifted her listless attitude slightly at sound of them. There was something beside the muddy waters and the swift running drift-wood to watch; she turned her eyes toward the direction of the sound. A black volume of smoke was curling far above her head. It was the giant's breath. She would wait for him. A long line of barges crept slowly into view around the bend of the river, four abreast, clumsy, awkward, lashed together in their helplessness, empty, with no vital force of their own, propelled by the sighing tired giant, a black-browed tow-boat. It gave her temporary interest outside of herself. Shep uttered a note of invitation, and skirmished around in the gloam-

ing for a stick of proper dimensions. It was an understood thing when he and Olga found themselves on the river bank when a boat passed, that she should send a stick into the swell that followed in its wake, and he was to fetch it to her with pride in his own seaworthiness. But to-night things were not as usual. Indeed, if Shep had paused to think he would have recalled that this was the first time he and Olga had ever visited the river bank at that unpropitious hour.

"No, boy, no, it is dark and the current runs swift," she said, taking the stick from his jaws, and sending it far land-ward. The tow-boat sighed and puffed its way onward; now it was where she could see its furnace fires, glowing like red and angry eyes from out the rushing waters; now it was abreast of her, and she could hear the voices of her crew, and see the men moving about on top the empty barges! now it had passed her post of observation, and steamed slowly around the next bend in the river, sending its long swelling-waves sullenly surging against the bank where the lonely girl stood silhouetted against the gray sky. A splash! and Olga knew that a small portion of the bank, loosened by the swell from the barges, had slipped into the river. Then she remembered that the people on the place had had a good deal to say lately about the caving of the banks. She remembered that she had heard Eustis say to his mother yesterday at breakfast, (how far away in the past that yesterday

seemed!) that he was almost afraid to stack his cotton-seed on the bank, for fear it would cave in before the boats should stop for it. And yet, there it was, just behind her, hundreds and hundreds of sacks piled up in long rows. She speculated vaguely as to the probability of its all caving in that night. The poor hands would be the losers, the negroes, who had been holding on to these seed for better prices. She would be sorry for any thing that would make them any poorer. With a sharp pang it came to her that it was her own people she was pitying. Pitying them for their poverty and their struggles, and in her thoughts she went on adding their ignorance to their poverty, and their Godlessness to their ignorance, until the sum total was wretchedness, pure and simple. But the pity for them staid with her still, and grew. Another splash, heavier than the first! A larger portion of the treacherous bank caved in. With her eye she measured the extent of bank outside the pile of seed. Was it likely it would cave up to the seed before morning? They should not have stacked them so near the brink. How queerly these commonplace considerations were mixing themselves up with the great grief that swallowed up every other trouble, as Aaron's serpent swallowed up all the others. Old Dora's withered face and awful malediction were before her always. Would she ever rid herself of them? And that was her grandmother! Of that race she was sprung! Then a deep

silence seemed to envelop the world and her own tired soul. Of that silence was born a resolve! Cut off forever from the race to which she belonged by education and sympathy, she must be as lonely as Lot's wife, left upon the plain to perish. Since she was never to be happy here on earth, she must dedicate her life to the happiness of others. Her mother's people should be the better for her having been: "And then, oh God! perhaps indeed Thy peace Thou wilt grant unto me." With clasped hands she turned her streaming eyes heavenward.

"Olga!" She heard her name called, first in tones of surprise, then angrily. "What in heaven's name are you doing here this time of the night?" It was Eustis Stanhope's voice, and with long strides he put himself by her side.

"I am not doing any thing, Mr. Stanhope," how quietly her voice came to him through the darkness. It was as if she was speaking to him from the other side of the gulf that had suddenly yawned between them. "It was very warm in my room, and my head ached, and I came here for cooler air. Shep is with me. He would not let any one harm me. Please don't speak so angrily."

"There is no one to harm you, so far as that goes, child," he spoke a little more mildly this time in pity for the ineffable sadness in her voice, "but I am thoroughly provoked with you, Olga. You are not

treating your friends with the openness they are entitled to." He was by her side now, digging his cane into the soft sand at their feet. The great yellow moon had risen slowly behind them and flooded the fields and river with pallid light. He could see her slight form tremble while he was speaking, but she should not sleep to-night without enlightening him, so he went on ruthlessly, not harshly though, "I have asked my mother to tell me what trouble had overtaken you. She tells me that she thinks it is due you, to let you decide on your line of action before any thing more is said about it."

"That was kind of her," Olga interrupted him to say.

"It was mystifying, and of all things I abhor mystery. So long as you are under my mother's guardianship it is my duty to ward off trouble from you, my duty, and—my pleasure, my dear little girl. I had no idea of finding you out here. I supposed you were still locked up in your room. I came to see if my seed were in any danger. But now that I have found you here—" was it instinct or what was it? Shep gave a low startled yelp, a strange gurgling of water followed it, the lower end of the long stack of cotton seed sacks quivered and tottered, Eustis flung his arm around Olga's waist and with breathless speed drew her with him land-ward, not a second too soon! The whole line of sacks tottered to their destruction, a rush of ingulfing waters, a boiling and foaming and eddying for the space of a

few moments, then the swift current of the river swept on over the very spot where Olga had been standing in her trance of woe for more than an hour. Eustis could feel her trembling in his clasp, her overstrained nerves could stand no more, for a second of frightened bewilderment she rested passively within the shelter of his arms. Her white face turned upward to him, her startled eyes resting on his in mute thankfulness for her rescue!

It was a wild impulse of unreasoning love that made Eustis Stanhope recklessly stoop at that moment and press a passionate kiss on the sweet quivering mouth. He held her close to him as he said, caressing her with his voice,

"My little Olga, suppose I had not been there?"

"Then I would have been at rest!" She pushed him from her with a force that surprised herself and without another word turned and fled. He did not try to keep pace with her. He walked on at a more leisurely gait. He could see her white dress fluttering before him in the road, Shep following close at her heels. He smiled to think how easy it would be to make it all right with her. "My little girl does not know me yet, she does not know that I love her well enough to make her my wife in spite of the world, the flesh and——my mother."

He went straight in to that mother's presence as soon as he got back to the house. He was glad to find her alone. Virgina had seen Olga flitting through

the house like a ghost and had followed her with curiosity and pity combining to force an entrance to her.

"Mother," said Eustis, going straight into his subject with a manliness that should have made his mother prouder of him than ever before. "I have just done something that doubtless will make you very angry. But I hope you will bear in mind that I am of age and am the best judge of my own happiness. I can't say that I meant to do what I have done, it was surprised out of me in a moment of peril, but I am ready and anxious to make good my words." He possessed himself of one of the long blue-veined hands that lay passively folded on his aristocratic mother's lap. Mrs. Stanhope's voice was trembling with apprehension, as she asked: "What was surprised out of you, Eustis? Who has been in peril, my son?"

Eustis laughed a trifle nervously, but answered resolutely:

"A confession of love was startled from me."

"For whom?"

"For Olga."

"Olga who?"

Mrs. Stanhope asked the cruel question in her iciest voice, that it might be borne in upon Eustis with stinging force that his love was a nameless charity girl. But all the pride and the stubbornness of all the Stanhopes of Stanhope Hall could not quench that love. He rose loyally to its defense. He answered very

gently, for he was not unmindful of what this thing must be to his mother. "We will give her a name, mother, and she will give us a world of sweetness and truth and tenderness."

"But you would, at least I suppose you would, like to know what little there is to be known about the parentage of your proposed bride? Or do you prefer not to investigate?"

Eustis was more startled by this unbroken calm on his mother's part than he would have been by the most violent outbreak. A deathly pallor spread over his handsome young face. "I should like to know all that you know, mother. It will not be pleasant to hear. Doubtless, I must brace myself for a shock. I have not just begun to acknowledge my love to myself, mother. I have fought against it with a pride worthy of your son. But I am convinced my happiness lies in Olga's keeping and I hope that you will consider that an offset to every thing. She is such a perfect little woman, mother!"

"Even to the strain of negro blood in her veins?"

"What!" Eustis bounded to his feet with the word. His voice was hoarse, great cords stood out on his forehead. "Take that back, mother. Any thing but that."

She was sure of him once more. There was a ring of demoniacal triumph in her next words. "Are you ready to take old Dora's granddaughter to wife?"

A death-like silence ensued! She could hear Eustis breathing like a man suddenly stricken with apoplexy. She reached out her hand to touch him. "Heavens! if she could but look into her boy's face!" Would the misery stamped thereon have put her more at her ease? Scarcely!

"Eustis!" (this death-like silence was harrowing).

"Yes, mother." (Was that her boy's voice?)

"Forgive me, son. It had to be done."

"There is nothing to forgive, mother. At least, I have nothing to forgive you. My poor little Olga! My lamb without blemish! My gentle sin-offering, how my heart bleeds for her! Yes; it had to be done."

"And so does mine," said Mrs. Stanhope, giving tardy ingress to the angel of pity, now that she had got her son back and the gulf of separation between him and Olga was finally fixed.

It was strange how unquestioningly both Olga and Eustis Stanhope had accepted Mrs. Stanhope's fiat in this momentous juncture. That there was any room for doubt touching the matter, seemed never to have occurred to them. Perhaps it was because the charge was in itself so heinous, that for it to be brought to bear upon its victim, its forestablished truth must be taken for granted. Be that as it may, they accepted it for a hideous truth and with it their allotted portion of suffering for the sins of others.

CHAPTER XXI.

ACCEPTANCE.

THE coarse crab-grass and the ready dock-weed were already clambering over the roughly made mound that marked old Dora's resting place, when Olga once more rode through the sweet-scented woods toward the cabin where the tragedy of her own birth-story and its narrator's swift-following death had been acted out. She almost envied the old woman, lying out there in the plantation burying-ground whose picket-fence she could see from the road. The thorn trees and the locust and pecans clasped sheltering arms to protect those humble sleepers from the sunshine and the rain, but her own way lay over and on and through the thorns. The superstitious terrors of the living made them shun this tree-shaded spot, where the honey-locust dropped its long pods silently on the grassy graves and the pecan nuts lay unsought save by the cawing crows and the birds sang requiems over the dead with the freedom that came of knowing no gunner would venture near the lonesome spot. It was restful and quiet out there under the honey-locusts

where they had laid old Dora, but with her—ah! well, she was under the curse!

She reached the cabin fence and halted as she had done on that stormy evening so long ago it seemed! Reuben was sitting on the block step, his head bowed listlessly, while his hands mechanically busied themselves shaping an ax-helve from a piece of smooth white ash. The growling of the pur-blind cur that lay at his feet, made the old man lift his head quickly. Nobody had come near the cabin since the day of the "buryin'," nor were they likely to come voluntarily. Dora's reputation as a conjurer still clung to her earthly tenement, and Rose and Reuben were left to win their way out of the shadow of their mourning as best they might. The old man took off the round cap made of a bit of bright carpeting and laid it on his knee in concession to Olga's presence, but did not rise. He was old and tired. He had been tired in every fiber of his being as far back as he could remember. Olga leaned over the fence from her pony's back to send her voice to him.

"Is—Rose at home, Uncle Reuben?"

[She had come there to put a well-matured plan into operation, but now that she was on the spot she almost hoped something would intervene to render it impracticable.]

Reuben turned his head listlessly toward the interior for a second: "Rose! hyere's w'ite folks axin' fur you,"

then his head dropped wearily, he resumed his bright cap, and started the gleaming blade of his huge clasp knife once more on its travels down the white-ash stick, the long white curls clinging caressingly to the blade.

If Rose was in the house Olga had no excuse for not carrying out her programme in all its details. She threw the pony's bridle over a picket, and slipping to the ground entered the little yard. It wore a deserted look with the empty chicken-coops tilted up against the side of the house, and old Dora's broom laid across the low rafters of the gallery, and the pepper bushes bending under the weight of their ungathered harvest. Olga's knees were trembling under her, and her very lips were blanched as she resolutely mounted the clumsy block step and passed into Rose's presence. She was stooping low over the open fire-place, preparing dinner. The smell of boiling pork and greens greeted Olga's nostrils, mingled with the odor of onions and stale tobacco. Her soul was sick nigh unto death, but she had come there to do what she had finally convinced herself was the only thing left for her to do, and should she recoil before a shock to her fastidiousness? She had submitted the matter prayerfully and tearfully to the only tribunal she recognized. To the question asked in her agony: "What wouldst Thou have me to do?" had seemed to come unmistakably the answer: "Take up thy cross and follow me." She was there in old Dora's cabin in response to that com-

mand. She was trying to take up her cross, but oh! what a heavy one it was for her childish shoulders. She was not doing this thing rashly. More than a month had passed now since she had stood in this cabin and trembled under old Dora's maledictions.

Waking up on the morning after her encounter with Eustis on the river bank, she had found herself unable to rise. Her throat was swollen and parched. Her flesh seemed sore to the touch, while shivering sensations whenever she so much as moved a hand convinced her that nature was being revenged on her for her reckless exposure to the night air. After which she had lain on a sick bed for nearly two weeks, sometimes forgetting in the acuteness of her bodily suffering all that had gone before and led up to it, not for long, however, at a time. Ginia's sisterly solicitude was too marked, and Mrs. Stanhope's kindness was too thoroughly impregnated with pity for her not to be reminded of the great change in her relations to those about her.

Ginia had formed her own theory of Olga's distress, and as no one cared to enlighten her it passed into a solution of the mystery that had so plagued her ever since that night Ollie had acted so strangely, receiving confirmation from Eustis's sudden departure for New Orleans on the very night of Olga's seizure. It was evident these two foolish people had been falling in love with each other, and Auntie Stanhope was furious

about it all. Virginia felt a glow of self-righteousness at the thought of this catastrophe befalling Olga instead of herself, and the satisfaction derived therefrom tinctured her bearing toward the sick girl with that tender solicitude under which poor Olga winced helplessly. It was with a sigh of thankfulness that she gathered from Ginia's ready gossip that Eustis had left Hardlines for an indefinite period of time. By the time he should have returned she would have carried into execution the plan whose germ had come to her in that dismal reverie upon the dark and treacherous river bank.

This was the plan she matured on her sick bed:

She would make one more effort to disprove herself the child that Rose had left in the Cleveland asylum, failing in that she would take the woman and keep her from want and educate her, and do, as far as she possibly might, a daughter's part by her. Her first effort to disprove her parentage consisted in writing a letter to Miss Denton, telling her all the occurrences of that time of agony, and asking if she, who had been Rose's employer about the period of her departure from home and later, could throw any light on the subject. With an aching heart and trembling hand good little Miss Denton had herself stripped the girl of the last remnant of hope. Her long letter closed with these words:

"To me you will always be a dear sweet child, whom I propose never to lose sight of. Come over to me.

My home and heart are both open to you. If I could I would have warded off this blow from you."

But to go to Miss Denton was not in accordance with Olga's plan. What that plan was she submitted calmly to Mrs. Stanhope:

"I am going to devote myself to the education and elevation of the—my own people," she said, with a resolute compression of her sweet mouth. "If you or Mr. Stanhope (I am quite sure he will not object), will permit me to occupy that new cabin in the edge of the woods between this and Bendemma, I will get the public school, and I will strive as never teacher strove before to make light shine in the dark places. Perhaps, Mrs. Stanhope," and her voice trembled over the words, "if they, the negroes, had been taught some things, even though they were slaves, taught how sinful sin is, how God loathes all impurity, taught how very hard the way of the transgressor must prove, and taught how their children even unto the third and fourth generation would have to suffer for their iniquities, they might not have gone so very far astray, and *I* need never have been. But it is worse than useless for me to look backwards. Happiness, such happiness, you know, as girls love to dream about, is so entirely out of the question for me, that unless I find some substitute for it my heart will be consumed as by slow fire. I will be a faithful teacher to the children growing up in ignorance around us, and will try to sow some good

seed in the hardened soil of the older people's hearts and minds. I hope you will not think it is doing too much for me to let me have the cabin. It is new, you know, and clean, and off there in the edge of the woods where I will not have to absorb every sight and sound from the quarters."

"But the loneliness of it, my poor child," said Mrs. Stanhope, not entirely oblivious of all that was involved in this life that Olga proposed to take up with a practical decision and apparent serenity that relieved the lady even while she marveled at it. Doubtless, she mentally concluded, the strain of servile blood in her veins was coming to the surface in form of this ready acceptance.

"I shall not be afraid," Olga answered readily; "and may I ask for a valuable present, Mrs. Stanhope? I do so want not to give up Shep. He is the only thing, you know, that will love me all the same. You and Ginia and Miss Denton and (Eustis's name would not come, at least not in that unsympathizing presence), every body will come after a while to think and speak of me with half-contemptuous pity as 'poor Olga,' 'Rose's unfortunate daughter,' or something of that sort. But Shep loves me for what I am. He will never change."

"You can have Shep and welcome, Olga, but I could not consent to let you live in that lonely cabin by yourself. If you are resolved on getting this public

school, and it will really pay you quite nicely, you had much better take board at Weston. I will speak to the trustees about getting the school for you, but you will have to look out for your boarding place."

"I would not board at Weston. There is not a house in the place but what is occupied by a low shop-keeper. To a man they are interested in making all they can off the negro. I want to educate them into the power of resisting just such influences as these men bring to bear upon them. I have thought of little else than the moral and mental conditions of these people since I have discovered that they are my people. You can see therefore how the shop-keepers and I would stand in each other's way. They would hate and hinder me, and I would oppose them with might and main."

"I am quite sure Mrs. Trowbridge, then," said Mrs. Stanhope, "would gladly give you a room for such help as you might render her out of school-hours. She is very delicate and needs assistance."

Olga leaned over the bed-side (where she lay during this first talk about her future) and looked Mrs. Stanhope searchingly in the face, forgetful of her blindness, as she asked, in almost a whisper: "Would she gladly give me a room, Mrs. Stanhope, if she knew every thing?" which was the first and only allusion Olga ever made to the connection of ideas that had forced itself upon her own mind as to her parentage, roughly

inducted into the knowledge of evil as she had been by old Dora's brutal revelations.

Mrs. Stanhope's high-bred face crimsoned painfully, she leaned back in her chair, at a loss what to say next. Olga went on more quietly:

"Moreover, I do not propose to live there by myself. I am going to take—my mother—to live with me. I want to do all I can for her benighted soul, poor untaught sinner. Oh! horrible, horrible, to find a mother as ignorant of the first principles of God's truths as the beasts of the field!"

For a few seconds the girl quivered under the convulsive emotion that overtook her like a sudden gust of wind. Mrs. Stanhope passed her hand soothingly over the smooth glossy hair that lay so near her chair: "Poor child, poor child," she said. "I pity you from my heart."

"Thank you," said Olga, drying her tears and once more entering into her plans, with a determined quietness that caused Mrs. Stanhope to think, in her spiritual blindness, that the iron had not entered very deeply, and doubtless in a few years, the child would be very well satisfied in her new sphere of authority and superiority. So it was to unfold this plan to Rose that Olga had ridden over to the cabin in the woods so soon as ever she was able to ride at all.

"Rose," she said, without any preamble, to the untidy woman bending over the open fire-place, "I

want to talk with you, please. Can you stop work for a few moments?"

Rose had straightened herself up with a start as these words came to her from the open door. She came forward, now, hastily wiping her greasy hands on her apron; smiling in welcome: "Goodness me if it ain't Miss Ollie!" she placed the best chair hurriedly within Olga's reach, then jerking off her begrimed apron, rolled it up and sent it as far as she could behind the bed, "I'm a sight to behold," she went on, with a nervous laugh, "Miss Denton would give me words if she caught me lookin' this way, but I can't wash and cook and clean house an' tend poultry and the lan' knows what besides, an' keep dressed up like a lady all the time too. How's the folks, honey? I 'lowed to get up your way soon wid a passel of plums. Miss Ginny loves plums, mightily, don' she though."

Poor Rose she fed the hungry mother heart in her by ministering to Ginia's wants whenever opportunity offered or could be made. She asked no more of fate. Her darling was safe. Her child was not under the curse!

"Yes," says Olga absently, "I believe she does. But, if your father is not in any particular hurry for his dinner, Rose, I would like to talk to you. Sit down, please."

"Father!" Rose laughed scornfully, as she cast a

careless look toward old Reuben's shabby bent back—"Unk Reube ain' none er my daddy. My pa's dead long years ago. He were another sorter man from Unk Reube."

Olga breathed a little freer. At least Reuben had no blood claim upon her! Rose seated herself with a look of some curiosity, but no special interest in her face. Olga studied her meaningless features for a puzzled second. Could it be heroic self-abnegation on the part of this woman, or did she not even suspect her of being the child she had placed in the Cleveland asylum? Was there then no such thing as mother instinct after all?

"Rose!" she asked with sudden directness, "have you ever heard any thing of the little child you left in the asylum at Cleveland? Don't you want to hear something of her?"

She was startled at the effect of her own words. Rose's large eyes dilated as if she had seen a ghost! Her face grew livid, she sat motionless and mute for a second, then flung up her hands and uttered a cry like a hunted animal. Old Reuben heard it and came in trembling haste to inquire into its cause. But not before him should the revelation of her disgrace be made. Olga waved him back imperiously:

"She does not need you, Uncle Reuben, I will care for her," and she did, standing up by the side of the trembling woman, and wiping away her tears with her

own handkerchief. "Please don't excite yourself, Rose. I have so much to say. And I need all my strength to say it."

Rose's emotion subsided as suddenly as it had arisen. It was always with her the fury of a moment: "What's happened?" she asked, in a voice whose stubborn quietness was in sharp contrast with the tragic abandonment of her first outburst.

"You haven't answered my first question yet," said Olga in a voice of angelic patience, and repeated it: "Have you ever heard any thing about her, Rose?"

"Yes," said the woman, looking sullenly down at a knot-hole in the bare floor of the cabin. "I know all I want to know; what's the use you coming here pesterin' about it for?"

"You know where she is, Rose? Don't be afraid to talk to me."

"Yes! Now, den, wil' horses shan't drag no more out of me."

Hope died hard in poor Olga's breast. She did not know until that moment how much she had hoped Rose herself would give the lie to old Dora's statement. There was no use stringing out useless questions. She might as well tell Rose all about her visit to the cabin, and about her mother's revelations, which she did in a low, intense voice, speaking very slowly, so that the woman should be able to take it all in. Rose moved neither hand nor foot after one startled

exclamation over the treachery of her mother, and yet she was herself meditating yet deeper treachery.

"And so, Rose," she heard Olga say in conclusion, "I am going to take you to live with me, and I will be very glad to keep you in comfort all the rest of your days. I can not promise to feel like a daughter to you. That is impossible; but I will be considerate of you in all things. And, Rose, one thing I would like to say: No good could come of telling about this to all the world, and it would weaken my authority with the people whom I want to influence for good, but—if it is your wish that I should be known as your daughter—" She stopped, her breath was coming in quick, panting inspirations.

Rose's hands went out deprecatingly: "Honey, if you'll take me to live with you, I'll be jus' like a servan' to you all my life. I ain' gwine t' las' much longer, an' you won' be pestered with me ve'y long. You's a good chile. You's a good, sweet chile, an' de Lord will remember you for this day's work."

Only for a brief second did it occur to her to correct the error her mother had made. If Dora's revelation had revealed the truth, Rose would have been ready to curse her in her grave. As it was, the mistake had only made Virginia's safety doubly safe. In a fleeting second of remorse she pitied this girl whose refined beauty, whose dainty neatness, whose cultured mind must all be sacrificed in the life she was about to take

up in her supposed dedication of it to duty. "But better her than my own," Rose said to herself, and ruthlessly riveted the bonds of error her mother had forged.

"I ain' goin' to pester you for a love you jus' can't feel, my sweety," she said, dropping her eyes before the pure gaze she could not encounter. "There's nothin' to be gained by tellin' folks any thing. Mammy done wrong in tellin' it out to you, an' the Lord, He punished her for it quick enough. Folks needn't to know nothin', but that you's Miss Ollie that lives in the new cabin, and teaches the folks on Bendemma and Hardlines, and Rose lives wid you and does for you. If I knowed how to beg your pardon for all the wrong I done long ago, honey, I'd beg it, but what's done, 's done. Never mind——" she hesitated. In her benighted soul she took credit to herself for the attitude she assumed. "Call me Rose, honey, just plain Rose. I don't deserve nothin' better at yo' hands. An', honey," (she would make up in willing servility what she lacked in truthfulness), "you can't ask too much of me. And, maybe, it won't be for long, you know, and when I'se done gone to lay me down by mammy's side, out yon' under the thorn trees, if I gets a hearin' up above, I'll ask Him to save de crown uv de peace-makers for you," says Rose, breaking down entirely once more, and covering her face with her thin, yellow hands, through which Olga could see the tears trickling.

The last words were altogether meaningless to Olga, who had no clew to them. How could she divine that Rose was enrolling her among the peace-makers, because, by this ready assumption of filial duties, she was forever securing Ginia's occupation of an exalted social position and a life of peace and pleasantness, which Rose herself would gladly have died to secure for her child? Olga only saw in her emotion a tenderness of conscience, and a quickness of remorse, that promised good soil for the seed she meant to sow so soon as she had taken this poor cast-a-way under her own protection. So, with a few words spoken with intent to smooth a mother's way, she got up and went away, promising to send for Rose at the proper time.

She thanked God that night for the measure of strength granted her for this interview, and set her face like a flint toward the carrying out of her plans with all expedition.

CHAPTER XXII.

OLGA'S BOX.

AND so the days moved on, unmindful of all the shattering of plans and the blighting of hopes, and the tumbling of bright air-castles that marked their passage from spring to winter, as the track of a ruthless conqueror is strewn with wrecks and ashes and devastation, until they reached the short bleak December days, when every thing pleasant seemed to come to a stand-still about Stanhope Hall, where, behind closed doors and windows brooded more than a physical discontent.

Winter, in those low latitudes, where the much be-sung "beautiful snow" conveys no idea more exhilarating than that of mud and slush, where the mitigating joys of a northern winter are things received by hearsay and not by sight, must always seem altogether evil to those pessimists, who, taking a narrowly personal view of nature's most immutable laws, shiver and moan through the wet, wind-pierced days with a sense of personal injury upon them; and the three who formed the family circle at the Hall, were none of them

capable or anxious to lighten each other's burdens in this respect.

"It's just too dismal for any thing," Ginia declared, yawning audibly over the book she held in her lap, but staring out at the dripping rain that pattered noisily down upon the heaps of dead leaves that even in mid-winter cumbered the uncared for terraces in front of the Hall. Mrs. Stanhope's big wooden knitting-needles clicked monotonously, and she could hear Eustis knocking the billiard balls about in the room across the big hall in a lazily indifferent way. "I wish Ollie was here," she said wistfully. "'I nearly die for somebody to talk to of nights. I wonder if it's cold over there in that cabin? The idea of a girl like that going crazy about educating the colored people! Mercy! it would kill me, just kill me, I know, to have those horrid little dirty wretches crowding close about me with their grimy slates and greasy primers."

"Olga has a great deal of will-power," said Mrs. Stanhope placidly, loosening a fresh supply of wool from her ball. "I hope she is comfortable. They say she is doing wonderful work among the freedmen already."

"I think it's the strangest thing in the world what a mystery was made over that——"

"Virginia," Mrs. Stanhope interrupted her in her most authoritative voice, "I have had occasion before to tell you that Olga's decision met with my entire approval. That is all you need to know."

Ginia closed the book on her lap with as near a bang as she dared venture upon and sauntered sulkily over to the window, where she stood staring out on the moist comfortless landscape while she drummed on the window pane with her pretty taper fingers. This was one of the days when a body just didn't know what to do with oneself. The billiard balls stopped after while and the door behind her opened to admit Eustis. He looked of a piece with the day, cloudy and unpromising. His presence, however, gave her release. There was one thing, and only one, a body could do to amuse oneself on such a day, and that was to "rummage." It was her delight, and always had been, to rummage in the big back room under the roof, where the accumulated finery of Mrs. Stanhope's society days now lay stored and forgotten for this many a year. Here on her knees before a big trunk, bedecked in a glistening silk, with the door locked against possible intrusion, not without a sort of guilty consciousness that she was doing what she ought not to do, Ginia lost all count of time and all care for the lowering clouds, whether on Eustis's handsome face, or on the far away skies. What cared she for skies or clouds when she heard the soft silken rustle of the long trains of Mrs. Stanhope's dinner dresses as she slipped into them one after another and trailed them over the dusty floor of the garret room! What unsatisfactory glimpses she caught of herself in the dingy looking glass, hung so high over the old-

fashioned bureau! If she could only catch a glimpse of the train! To whom would all this wasted splendor belong some day? Why not to her! Who would "carry it all off" better? She gazed at her own pretty flushed cheeks in the dust-dimmed mirror, with entire satisfaction. Would these all be hers? Did not Mrs. Stanhope often call her daughter, even now?

Eustis said he hated frivolous women. But was not she studying and practicing and reading "awfully hard," so as not to be frivolous. Was there any body prettier than she within his reach? Wouldn't he have to marry somebody some of these days? Could he go on knocking billiard balls about and riding in to town and back with the morning's paper all his life? He wouldn't even go to Hardlines now, said he meant to sell the place! If he ever had been in love with Ollie, he must despise her now that she was school-mistress to the colored people! All these and a host of other disjointed reflections jostled themselves about in Ginia's giddy head, until she settled down into more absorbed and quieter interest before a discovery that assumed the proportions of a mystery.

She had penetrated to the very bottom of one of Mrs. Stanhope's largest trunks. About her on the chairs, on the floor, on the lid of the trunk was scattered the accumulation of her research. Into the heap upon the floor she sank with flushed cheeks and dancing eyes clasping close her latest treasure trove.

It was a small black wooden box, tied about in a clumsy and unsystematic manner with strong twine strings, looking as if security rather than neatness had been aimed at. The box itself was of rose-wood blackened by time, with brass tips at the four corners and a brass name-plate on the top. "Either a work-box or a writing desk," Ginia concluded, placidly applying herself to the task of loosening the many knots that bound it. No easy task, for they had been tied many and many a year ago, with rigid intent. "It was so very heavy that it must contain jewelry! Who knew, diamonds perhaps? Mrs. Stanhope's diamonds! But she would try them on all the same. If Ollie was there she would tell her "it was disgraceful," that was what Ollie always said when she begged her to "rummage" with her. But Ollie was far enough away over yonder in the poor little cabin of her own choosing teaching woolly headed boys and girls, and she had the trunks and the silks and the—here in frantic eagerness to penetrate the mystery of the black box Ginia took out her pocket-knife and cut the stubborn knots recklessly. Still the lid would not yield! With a violent jerk she separated box and lid. The top parted suddenly and entirely from the rusty hinges, and fell to the floor with a sound that was magnified by the stillness of the room and the nervous tremor of a guilty conscience. A faint odor of violets floated out upon the damp air of the garret-room. A faded damask

d'oyley lay spread over the contents of the box. Ginia lifted it reverently, prepared for the dazzle of jewels. Instead—the most conspicuous object was a sealed letter on which was written : " For my little daughter Olga, to be given to her when she comes of age. Until then to be kept by the matron of the asylum in Cleveland, to whom her faithful nurse has promised me she would take her when I die. I do not want my daughter to have this box or letter before, because she must have arrived at an age when calm and judicious decision in a matter of great moment is possible for her."

All this written in a close fine hand was upon the surface of the letter. This then was Ollie's box after all ? And why had it not been given to her? Perhaps the time had not come yet, but it soon must. How she wished she knew what was in that letter! But that of course she never would. She laid the letter, wrapped about with the faded d'oyley on the floor by her side, with a virtuous sensation of resisting a mighty temptation. Then she proceeded calmly to examine the contents of the box. They were none of them very valuable. In fact, coming as they did in place of the diamonds she had prepared her mind for, they were altogether disappointing. " Mere trumpery," she said contemptuously, trying on the little gold thimble that was bent and had holes in the end of it. And opening the tiny blue enamel box that was filled with odds and

ends of cheap jewelry, mostly broken, and casting aside as not worth a glance, a bulky package of letters, that would have been to Olga pearls without price. There were faded ribbons carefully folded about bits of pasteboard; there was a tiny gold watch attached to a chain of gold and onyx links; there was a little Bible that looked as if it had been very much read; and there was a clumsy double ambrotype case, in one side of which was the picture of a sweet worn woman face, on the opposite, a black-browed, black-eyed man with a fierce mustache and a sneering face above it. "Olga's papa and mamma, I suppose."

"Much good may it do her to find out how they looked! I'd rather not know any thing about mine. Her father looks like a pirate."

Ginia was still gazing at the ambrotype when the unwonted sound of carriage-wheels caused her to start suddenly to her feet. If she was very expeditious she could see who it was as the carriage came around the curve. Forgetful of the long silken train she was still encumbered by, she sprang impetuously to her feet, stumbled, caught at the edge of the open trunk before her, heard a crash, which she did not stop to investigate, flew to the window just in time to see Miss Denton's old white horse and enfeebled buggy creep into sight, with the little old lady herself in it, but driven this time by a decidedly masculine escort.

"He's come!" says Virginia, gazing down for a sec-

ond on the unconscious couple through the dormer window. Then turning hastily about to cram the contents of the trunk back into place: "What a godsend, visitors on such a day!" Ollie's ambrotype lay in a thousand bits at her feet! With a cry of dismay she fell on her knees and began hastily gathering up the bits. What could she do? What should she do? Nothing but hide it. Hide it all. Put it back in the box until at her leisure she could fix it all as nearly as possible as it had been before. But there was no time to do that now. They would be calling for her down stairs before she got half those things put back in the trunk. With breathless speed she divested herself of the heavy silk dress, flung the contents of the trunk pell-mell back into it—pushing along with it the d'oyly-wrapped letter—shoved the broken picture back into the box, gathered lid and all into her trembling arms, and had barely gained a safe hiding place for it in her own room, when the anticipated call came for her. The summons reached her through "Dumps."

She was wanted down stairs. "Ole Miss hed comp'ny."

"Who is it, Dumps?" Ginia asked, feigning ignorance, while she gained time to freshen up a little in the matter of her hair that had become towzled with the trying on of many dresses, and to applying powder to cheeks that were rosy from commingled excitement and hurry.

"Miss Denton en Mister Bob."

"Who is 'Mr. Bob'?"

"Law, Miss Ginny, whar yo' years ben all dis time, dat you ain' ben hearin' Mr. Bob done come home? He owns de place where Miss Denton lives, en she done tuk keer on him w'en he was ve'y little. I recollects him w'en he wasn't no higher dan dis." Dumps held one greasy hand about two feet from the floor, and then suddenly whirled on her heels and disappeared, seemingly not thinking it worth while to enlighten Ginia any further on the subject of Mr. Bob.

Ginia followed at a more leisurely gait, vainly wishing that the cold, damp air of the halls would annul the burning color in her cheeks.

She entered the room in her shyest manner. It was strategy thrown away. There was no one there but Mrs. Stanhope and Miss Denton, who was sitting close up to the lady of the Hall, sending her words vigorously into the ear next to her, quite as if Mrs. Stanhope were deaf as well as blind. She nodded pleasantly to Ginia, and held out her hand, without stopping:

——"And I was saying to myself this morning that I would only wait long enough to get a good lot of servants established for Robert, and give him some notion of his own affairs, then I would carry out my long-ago-formed plan of going to Olga. I'm going to

live with her. Poor, lonely darling! She's a perfect heroine. Her letters to me are the most beautiful things—but—of course you hear from her too. Bob doesn't know a word of my plans yet." Miss Denton's sentences often became involved.

"No," said Mrs. Stanhope, flinching, as she always did, from any prolonged discussion of Olga's affairs. "There is no reason why she should write, unless to Virginia for old association's sake. We hear nothing direct."

"Well, then, if you haven't heard direct, you've just got to listen to this,"says Miss Denton, imperatively, as she dives into her pocket and fishes up a letter, from which she reads;

"You ask me if I am lonely, my dear Miss Denton. There are times when I feel forsaken of God and man. These are in the long dull evenings when the feeble light from my kerosene lamp flickers and loses itself in the dark rafters of my unceiled room; when Rose sits on the other side of the table at which I am writing, her poor, bewildered eyes following my pen with such childlike, eager curiosity that my soul is filled with bitterness against the institution that made it possible for human beings with hearts and brains and souls to live and die in such animal ignorance of all but their mere physical needs. Can I ever make her companionable? Can I ever bridge over the awful chasm between us? I reach out my hands to

her helpfully, ay, wishfully, but more and more she seems to shrink within herself, treating me with a deference that is servility, and with homage that is all pain to me. But things grow brighter, dear, when the day comes back and I know I can fill every moment of the time with useful endeavor to lighten ignorance so dense that small wonder all the vices follow in its train. Ah! I wish I was older, wiser and better fitted for this task. Feeble as I am, and novice in the work, I can see how herculean is the undertaking, but not hopeless. We see partisan statements in the papers, (for I read all I can find on this subject now), that, on the one side would make you believe the negro does not care for mental or moral improvement, that he is a mere imitator and will only imitate to a certain grade of easy ascent and there stop or retrograde; you will read, on the other hand, that his soul, emancipated when the shackles of slavery were struck off, pants for the waters of knowledge with thirst born of long waiting: but one who lives among them, and thinks of scarcely any thing but them, must form a more correct estimate and will find it between the two. Ah! my dear Miss Denton, in the happy days when you were teacher and I was care-free pupil, if I'd only known what Providence had in store for me, how much harder I would have studied, for now I feel as if I have so little to give out where so much is needed. My day-school I find irksome and commonplace. Composed of boys

and girls with the usual juvenile abhorrence of hard study. But my night-school taxes brain and heart more severely. Then stalwart men, some far beyond the prime of life, and dull-eyed women sit patiently on the hard wooden benches, while I try to instil into their stunted conception the lessons they should have imbibed scores of years before. With them I strive after a moral conquest. If I can but make one man, or one woman, among them all hate a lie because God hates it, loathe a sin because sin is loathsome, or shrink from a theft because the command has gone forth 'thou shalt not steal,' I will not count my life a failure."

Miss Denton paused to wipe away the tears that were making her glasses too dim to be seen through.

Virginia seized this opportunity to ask querulously, "Why should Ollie want to bridge over the chasm between her and Rose? why should she want to make her companionable? Rose, a horrid, slovenly, ignorant colored woman and Ollie so pretty and refined?"

"Because Olga is an angel," says Miss Denton with enthusiasm that sounded snappish, "and—and—where was I, oh, yes," then, with a sudden revulsion, she shoved the letter back into its envelope saying, "but, there's no use baring her tender confessions any further. She makes a pathetic little allusion to her coming birthday, though how the child can have got hold of any thing from that stupid woman, I can't see."

"What stupid woman?" Ginia asked, eagerly alert over any item that would help solve the mystery of Olga's sudden separation from the family.

"Virginia," says Mrs. Stanhope, "see that Margaret has boiled custard for dinner, and you must superintend Dumps in the dining-room. I don't want Robert's first dinner with his old friends to be an entire failure."

Ginia took her dismissal ungraciously but submissively. "You know," said Mrs. Stanhope, "Virginia knows nothing more than that Olga has selected her own line of self-support. Her coming birth-day is her eighteenth I believe."

"Yes."

"Then the time has come when she is entitled to receive the box given me by the matron of the asylum."

"What is in it?"

"That I do not know. I was told that the child's nurse left it with her with a verbal request that it should be given her on that day, stating it to be the mother's wish," with mocking emphasis on nurse and mother.

"That's queer."

"Not at all. When this woman Rose put her child at the asylum it was evident she passed herself off as its nurse in order to protect it against the charge of mixed blood. If you really intend going over to the swamp, I should like you to take charge of that box."

"I really intend going over the latter part of this month for about two weeks. I am simply waiting to organize Robert's household. I'm quite sure I shall be in the dear boy's way after that. Besides, I've no notion of waiting for his wife to turn me out." And as Ginia came back to announce her duties done she heard Mrs. Stanhope say decisively: "I will have the box ready to send by you."

Her heart sank within her at the prospect of being summarily ordered to fetch the box that was now lying all "at sixes and sevens" between the mattresses of her bed, but Mrs. Stanhope glanced off to another subject, and Miss Denton's forehead had taken on those three little wrinkles between the brows that Ollie used to call her puzzle wrinkles.

They were her puzzle wrinkles. For the first time the possibility of a doubt had entered Miss Denton's mind, and she hailed its advent with joy,

Might there not after all be some mistake about Rose and Olga? that was the doubt that wrinkled Miss Denton's smooth forehead and set her honest heart beating high with hope for the girl she loved and honored.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DR. MADDOX.

"AND what has Robert's long sojourn North done for him?" Mrs Stanhope asked, by way of dropping Olga out of the discussion. [She could not quite forget that romantic episode of her son's with the asylum child, and with finite justice she resented it by vaguely blaming Olga for every thing.]

"Sent him home minus a few moldy prejudices and plus some good healthy new notions, I hope," Miss Denton answers briskly. "You know Robert is Dr. Maddox now. I feel immensely deferential toward him and have to keep on reminding myself how often I've kept him in and locked him up and done every thing but switch him, to save myself from becoming absolutely abject to him now."

Mrs. Stanhope sighed! Robert Maddox and Eustis had started on the race pretty evenly handicapped. Eustis seemed to be sinking into a languorous indifference to every thing; while every one was predicting immense success for his friend. Miss Denton loved to talk of "her boy," so she cantered off briskly once more, on her pet hobby:

"Yes, Robert has come home with that curly head of his chock-full of plans and intentions and ideas that will perhaps bring down plenty of criticism of an uncomfortable sort from those of his old friends, or rather, his father's old friends (for Bob belongs to the New South), who are absolutely incapable of expansion. Thank heaven, men of that sort are growing fewer in our midst every year."

"But what sort of plans and intentions?" Mrs Stanhope asks uneasily. [She shrank with conservative horror from such vaguely outlined possibilities. The "New South" had such a terribly revolutionary sound. It might mean just any thing, you know. Mrs. Stanhope was opposed on general principles to new any thing.]

"Oh! about every thing, my dear," Miss Denton says with breezy comprehensiveness; "about sanitary improvement, and land syndicates and,—and, well about the negro most 'specially."

"The negro! It seems to me the world has gone wild on that one subject."

"Not the world exactly, but he is undoubtedly the problem in this country to-day, and a very knotty one at that, if columns of type and an awful spilling of argument is any test."

"And how does Robert propose to settle this vexed question? I don't doubt from what you say that he has come home fully prepared to do so."

"Now, my dear, don't wax sarcastic at my Bob's

expense. Bob is just the humblest minded boy you know of. There's your dinner bell and I never was as glad to hear any thing in my life, I'm positively ravenous. You can make Robert explain his own position to you at table, that is provided you want it explained."

The young man who entered the dining-room with Eustis a few minutes later carried no visible suggestion in his face, of the reformer overpowered by a sense of monstrous evils to be reformed. There was a joyousness, if one may so call it, in the glance of his bright blue eyes, a sweetness in the curves of his unbearded lips, that were the flowers of his optimistic nature. That there were many and manifold evils crying aloud for correction he did not doubt any more than he doubted that God's power being equal to His goodness these evils would be righted in His own good time and manner. If he might be used as an instrument he would be glad, but he did not contemplate life gloomily nor hopelessly. His quick brisk step, ruddy complexion, sharp incisive utterance, and alert glance, were all in painful contrast to Eustis's almost sluggish acceptance of his lot as it had been marred by untoward circumstances.

Amiable little Miss Denton felt a sort of satisfaction in the reflection that Mrs. Stanhope could not contrast the two "boys" as they entered the room together; she thought Eustis "was aging" already.

Dr. Maddox's gaze rested wonderingly for a brief

second on the pretty girl behind the soup-tureen. Miss Denton had written him years ago about Mrs. Stanhope's charity asylum orphans, but this slim-waisted, fair cheeked girl, with the wavy black hair arranged in such stylishly fluffy bangs, with the large tender eyes that challenged you to admire them even at the moment of coyly veiling them under white lids, could never be the asylum girl! He stood with his hand on the back of his chair in an attitude of waiting, noticing which Eustis did a daring thing:

"Miss Virginia Stanhope, Bob, my mother's adopted daughter."

Mrs. Stanhope's patrician blood mounted slowly to her blue veined temples. Virginia's glance was full of terrified surprise. It was the first time the two names Virginia and Stanhope had been coupled in sound. This was not the way her foolish fancy had coupled them. But it settled every thing, she told herself vaguely, and fell demurely to ladling out the turtle-soup in front of her, wondering the while Miss Denton had never told them how good-looking Dr. Maddox was. Virginia's heart was very much on the order of the turtle eggs that entered into the composition of the soup she was ladling out with such grace, combining toughness with softness, taking an impression from the slightest touch, only to lose one indentation for another whenever the pressure should be applied to a new spot.

"Miss Denton tells me, Robert," says Mrs. Stanhope, filling up the interim of waiting while Dumps slowly labored to prepare the table for dessert, "that you have come home with an alarming stock of ideas or a stock of alarming ideas, which is it?"

"Certainly not the former and I hope not the latter," says Dr. Maddox, with a rollicking laugh at his own expense.

"You would say the latter, mother," says Eustis; "he's been giving me his views on the subject of the future of the negro with the most shocking disregard for precedent. I'm a trifle in advance of you and maybe of Miss Denton there, but I'm not prepared to follow Bob the length he would have me go."

"Not prepared! There it lies in a nut-shell," says Robert eagerly, "but you will come to think as I do, Eu, before many more years roll over your head unless you are already fossilized—"

"Only partially," Eustis muttered sourly, but the doctor went on unheeding—

"The march of ideas is slow at best, but they creep where men are shut off from the nerve centers of progress as we are here, and everywhere where those aids to civilization, railroads, are practically impossible."

"But my dear Robert!" says Mrs. Stanhope querulously, "what does all this ado about the negro and his future status and his rights and his wrongs amount to? Didn't he get every thing on earth he could possi-

bly want in getting his freedom? He is doing well enough."

"Is he, Mrs. Stanhope? That is the question of to-day. Is he doing well enough for himself or for us? Is he doing well enough to become in time self-asserting against the evil political influences that will always aim to secure his casting vote? Is he doing so well that in the course of time the right sort of color distinction shall exist between the two races which are indissolubly linked together for all time to come, and yet perfect amity prevail?"

"I think he is," says Eustis, taking up the argument for his mother. "There are many hopeful signs visible in every direction, in spite of what the pessimists say. He is gradually getting rid of the restlessness which, immediately after the war, told so against the interests of both employer and employed. The annual local flittings, begotten oftener of his financial failure and disappointment than of any thing else, are growing less frequent than formerly as he comes to form a juster estimate of values. He is unambitious and incurious by nature, and his fleeting desire to explore untried ground is dying out rapidly. I suppose you might cite the Kansas craze in contradiction, but as that hegira was simply the outcome of false and alluring promises which had its sad and prompt sequel in the home-coming of boat-loads of foot-sore and heart-sick dupes, it counts for nothing in the way of argument. Then again he is getting

beyond the childishness of spending all his profits from his crops on brass jewelry and pewter watches and cheap fire-arms. He is becoming wiser and shrewder in barter and trade. Oh! yes, there is noticeable improvement."

Robert's blue eyes flashed as he answered hastily:

"You are arguing from a commercial point of view exclusively, I see. There is noticeable improvement, because he stays in your cabins and tills your land from year to year instead of wandering away to your neighbors, to his pecuniary loss, and yours too, or because he puts his money into a pair of blankets instead of into a watch without works, or because he can hold his own a trifle better in trade with the Jew shop-keepers, who swarm about the plantations like so many vampires waiting to suck his blood."

"Well, what more would you have? You've not come home imbued with any social equality nonsense, I hope, Bob! It won't go down here, Bob. I advise you to stop short of such radicalism. I do, indeed. We stand a good deal down here from people who do not understand us and are not in sympathy with us, but you ought to know and feel where the rub comes."

"I think I do, Eu," Doctor Maddox leaned over and laid his hand affectionately on his old friend's shoulder, "and it is just because I do know and feel where the rub comes, that I am in such dead earnest about bettering matters for my own people of both

colors. For they are our people, Eustis, peculiarly ours bound, to us by the past and the present and the future. Men may multiply statistics as they will to try to prognosticate the relative position of the Southern whites and blacks in nineteen hundred and eighty-five, but it is the colored man of to-day we have to live with, and do with. They may exhaust themselves devising schemes of adjustment that don't adjust and never can be made to adjust any thing. Suggestions as to the negro's future can only be valuable as they are based upon an intimate knowledge of him as he is to-day, and no one has that knowledge in its entirety but the Southern young men of to-day, Eustis. You and I and the rest of the boys who have been born and reared among them at the time when our country was in the throes of revolution. To us the tremendous fact of emancipation came when we were young and malleable enough to bend under the shock of it without being broken; when our point of vision had not been so immovably focused as to disable us from looking at the question of freedom from both sides, not seeing in it exclusively a death-blow struck at ourselves, our inheritance and our rights. The older Southern men are too sore to grapple the problem of to-day impartially, and the Northern man is too ignorant."

"Well, what are you going to do about him? He is here and here he is going to stay, and we are here and here we are going to stay."

"Precisely. And it is that fixedness of both races that gives the question its vital importance. Without claiming for the negro any special local attachment, it is safe to say he is totally void of any spirit of enterprise which would ever tempt him to try his fortunes in strange lands. The power to forecast with certainty the destiny of man or nations does not belong to mortals, but it requires no second-sight to forecast the future of this country if we are not wise in time. So long as he remains ignorant, he must prove a source of danger. He is physically a strong man, and strength unsanctified by moral courage is the most dangerous sort of brute force. We can never hope to gain any thing by that kind of self-assertion which will bring him into obnoxious contact with the ruling race. We can never hope to gain any thing by riveting upon him the bands of ignorance, which only lead him to imagine wrongs that do not exist, and to nourish antagonisms that injure himself alone. With the expansion of his intellect and the cultivation of his humanity, his self-esteem will be increased, and in proportion as he begins to recognize intelligence and respectability, and all the decencies of life as among his own possible possessions will he prize them more highly in others, especially in those who aspire to be his leaders."

"But we are educating them," says Eustis, rather irritably, for his friend was harping on a string that gave forth most discordant notes.

"After a fashion, yes. Doubtless there are educational centers established for him where tremendous strides in the right direction have already been taken. But after all what does educating such a horde of densely ignorant people involve?

"It means that constant dropping that wears away the stone. It means that sowing of our seed broadcast, taking no thought whether it fall among the brambles or in the stony places, so we chance the good soil along with the bad. It means an up-rooting as well as an ingrafting, for they have as much to unlearn as to learn. It means the line upon line, the precept upon precept, the here a little and there a little, which every man and woman, yes, and boy or girl, has in his or her power to instil into the confused and bewildered, but receptive minds of one of the most docile races on earth. The great problem of the future of the negro is ours of the South to solve, and ours alone, and woe be to us if in any other spirit than that of absolute fairness we set about the task. Don't let us fall into the error of thinking him simply a convenience, where once he was a chattel."

"It means," says Miss Denton, taking the words from him, "just what Olga Seleman has set herself to do, and is doing, while the rest of the world is talking about doing it."

"Olga Seleman! Who is she? The name sounds Jewish."

"She is one of God's chosen hand-maidens," says Miss Denton, with shining eyes, and Eustis Stanhope bowed his head reverently, but no one thought it worth while to explain to Dr. Maddox that from "nameless" poor Ollie had evolved her Jewish sounding cognomen.

("You know," she had said piteously, "I must have some name for the use of the school directors.")

As they sat over their cigars a little later on, Eustis Stanhope forced himself to tell Robert, in answer to his persistent questioning, enough about Olga and her self-assumed calling, to enable that shrewd young student of human nature to form two wise conclusions:

Olga Seleman was no ordinary sort of girl.

His friend Eustis loved the girl with the Jewish name, but for some reason loved hopelessly.

"Pride and prejudice intervening, I suppose," he thought, watching the up-climbing wreaths of his cigar smoke, and turning his fancy upon Ginia's lovely eyes, that haunted him most unaccountably.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AUNT JUDY LITTLE.

FOR the leaf-strewn terraces of Stanhope Hall, which the dark and shining foliage of ever-green shrubs saved from utter desolation even at the dreariest season; for the chill stateliness of its loftily ceiled and softly carpeted rooms, where misery could at least wrap itself about with the cloak of dignity; for the graveled carriage drive, that made the house accessible under any stress of weather, given—a lonely wagon road, cut into deep, yawning ruts by constant travel, and gloomily shaded by close crowding forest trees; a low-roofed, unpainted cabin, through whose loosely weather-boarded walls the wind gained easy access; bare rooms, only redeemed from repulsiveness by the touch of a refined woman's hand; a rough picket fence inclosing a strip of new ground, where a few gaudy zenias and other hardy annuals contended feebly with the prevailing browns and grays, and you have Olga's home.

It was Saturday. The same Saturday that had been so suddenly tinged with romantic interest for Ginia by her introduction to Dr. Maddox. The days of the

week were all pretty much alike at the Hall, but with Olga and her small establishment Saturday was a day possessed of its own peculiar activities and excitements. That was the day when all work came to a sudden halt, independently of the most urgent need.

When the whirring of the gin-bands and the short, quick snorting of the little steam-engine and the busy buzzing of the saws, as they cut the seed from the lint, grew silent and motionless, and the gin-house, about which all the activities of the plantation clustered at this season of the year, was deserted. When the loads of ungathered corn or fodder lay in heaps about the fields, taking their chances for rain or theft or any other mishap that might befall before Monday. When the shops at Weston would begin to fill up early in the morning with a swarm of ignorant, careless, rollicking customers, ready to barter away all their interests in the crops not yet harvested, for the immediate possession of the gaudy wares in the Weston shops that represented to them all the world could offer of luxury and elegance, or for another quart of vile whisky. Blind to the fact that reckoning day must come, or that the cold wet winter was upon them when work and pay must all come to a stand-still and they must get through the dreary interval between as best they could with an empty larder and empty pockets. When the women busied themselves with preparing their finery for "meetin'" next day. It was Olga's most serene day

when the weather was fine, for then she and Shep seemed to have the whole fragrant world to themselves and she would wander miles through the leafless woods, luxuriously rustling the dead leaves under her feet; now stopping to gather the frost-ripened persimmons, that lay in bruised sweetness upon the ground; now startling a drove of plump speckled pigs from their pre-empted rights to the fallen pecans; now gathering armfuls of golden-rod and purple iron-weed or searching for ferns in the damp places; now sitting motionless on a stump to watch the gambols of her clumsy attendant. It seemed to Olga that the broadest charities, the keenest longings, the loftiest desires, and the sweetest subtleties of her life came to her in these woods, where the foot of man seldom trod, but where God seemed to come nearer to His lonely child and lay His consecrating touch upon her afresh and the angels of love ministered unto her.

But there was no rambling possible to-day. The woods were bare and the leaves were sodden, and the rain dripped, dripped, dripped from the eaves of the cabin roof. She could see old Reuben, out there in the rain, piling the cut fire-wood up on the gallery, so that to-morrow, when they should all have gone away to "meetin'," she should not suffer with the cold. She could see Rose, flitting busily from the dining-room to the little shed-room kitchen with the loaves of hot light-bread and the broiled chickens, and the sweet

potato pies, that were to furnish her with her cold Sunday dinner, when Rose, too, should have gone to meeting and left the house with no one but herself and Shep in it. They took good care of her, Rose and Reuben, but try as she might the barriers had never been broken down between herself and—her mother. Rose had assumed her own position and maintained it stubbornly, and Olga was acquiescent.

"You don't owe me nothin', honey. It's me that's done you all the harm. Be good to me as you kin, don't hate me no more than you can help. Let me do for you, but don't never try to treat me as your equal. I ain't your equal, my sweety, and nothin' you can do'll make me so. Now then we'll be happier that's settled."

So, gentle consideration on the one part, and eager service on the other marked their daily intercourse. And was Olga contented? Did no bright dream of the might-have-been ever run counter to the dark realities of her life, contracting her tender heart with quick spasms of pain? Did no rebellious murmurings against the decree that had allotted her time and opportunity to cultivate her most refined tastes, to acquire habits that were now a mockery, to form affections that were now crimes, never tincture with morbidness the long reveries of her leisure hours? Did no outcry against the burden that was almost too heavy to be borne ever escape upon the silent air of the autumn woods and

flutter heavenward to the throne of grace? Ah! who shall say? But if they did, He who seeth not as man sees, doubtless pitied, forgave and comforted!

It had grown quite dark out there in the wet woods, and the gloomy vision of the rain-soaked road was shut out by the closed shutters. The sound of Reuben piling the wood on the gallery had stopped. He had brought in the final armful and piled it on the stout iron fire-dogs, and it was now crackling and flaming in the big open fire-place, the sap singing with the joyousness of some long imprisoned thing, glad of escape. Rose's coffee-mill added its harsh rhythm to the crackling of the wood. It was too late to read and too early for lamps. The comfort of the hour was sufficient unto itself. Shep lay on the deer-skin rug at her feet, with his great human eyes turning now on her, now on the sparkling flames as they danced and leaped in the cavernous chimney place. Into this serenity a querulous voice was intruded: "Is you busy, Miss Olgie?" This was the universal plantation substitute for the more ceremonious knock of civilization. No answer was required or expected. The questioner advanced, apologizing for the muddy state of her shoes, which she planted squarely upon the deer-skin rug close to Shep's disgusted nozzle.

"Ah! Aunt Judy, is it you? It's late for you to be out on foot such a bad night, too," says Olga, not overjoyed at the interruption.

"I b'leeves you, honey, it is late, and it is a bad night, and I is too ole an' rheumatic t' be foolin' 'bout in dis yer mud, but w'at you think er dat?" she concluded, somewhat inconsequently, as she suddenly and clumsily dropped upon one knee, causing Shep to yield her dignified possession of the disputed rug, and to betake himself sulkily to the furthest corner of the room, while the old lady spread open on the deer-skin, for Olga's inspection, a bandanna handkerchief, the knotted corners of which she loosened with spiteful energy.

"What you think er dat?" Aunt Judy asked again, folding her arms impressively across her ample bosom as she settled into a more comfortable position on the rug.

"I think they are buttons!" says Olga, slightly wondering.

"I b'leeves yer, dey is buttons."

"And quite a good many of them."

"I b'leeves you, 'bout a peck on 'em."

Olga laughed. "Oh, no, Aunt Judy, let's call it three quarts."

"Not a button under a peck, an' t'ain' no laughin' matter, chile."

"But what do you want with so many, Aunt Judy?"

"I b'leeves you, w'at does I want wid so many? Wot does I want wid enny on 'em, less'n t'were a half dozen black bone ones to put on de boys' breeches."

"Then what did you get them for?"

"I b'leeves yer, w'at did I get 'em for. Kase dat fool nigger er mine, Henry Little, can't go whar dere's whiskey widout drinkin' it, en he can't drink it widout losin' de little senses he's borned wid, en dem sto'-keepers out to Wes'on done learnt by dis time dat ef ders anythin' on der she'fs dey can't git rid uv, er in der drawers er der show cases, all dey got t' do is to git my fool nigger drunk, en he'll spend de las' cent he's got in dis worl' en giv' er morgige on he's crap en mine too, t'bleege 'em w'en he's drunk, en dey promises him mo' whisky ef he do what dey tell 'im. How nigger gwine t'git ahead at dis rate I like t'know?"

"How, indeed?" echoed Olga, warmed to earnest advocacy of the old woman's case, as against the wily sharpers who beguiled her husband out of all his earnings, and his senses too.

"Dat was my money Henry spent on dem trashy buttons. My two dollars en a half dat I sol' chickens t'de boat wid las' week. An' w'en he was gwine out to Wes'on dis mornin' I sez, I did, Miss Ollie, now Henry Little, don' you go en make a fool uv yo'seff en drink my money all up (you see, honey, it were so muddy, I didn't keer to go sloshin' up t' town myseff kase t'morrer's brother Rush Mo'ton's fun'al, en I want to keep my w'ite petticut t' whar dere), I wants you to buy me a p'ar uv dem yeller silk mits to w'ar t' brother Rush's fun'al, en two yards er cotton checks, en a bar of yeller soap, en a packidge of cookin' soda——"

"And didn't he bring you any thing you sent for?" asks Olga, breaking in on the endless enumeration.

Aunt Judy rose to her feet and struck a tragic attitude, with one arm outstretched toward the buttons:

"Dat's w'at he brung me! Dar's whar my money gone to."

"It's a shame," said Olga so feelingly that the tears welled into Aunt Judy's flashing eyes, and her anger was quenched in self-pity.

"I b'leeves you, it is a shame. Ole Mars wouldn' a'lowed a parsel uv Jew shoppers to settle down on his plantation to squeeze de life out'n his folks. W'at his son about? dat he can't stay on de place en try to keep things straight a little. Whose gin but Hardlines' gin is swarmin' wid de shop-keepers, a-waitin' to grab de cotton as soon as it come from de press, en haul it, en ship it, en let de folks dat's toiled en moiled over it all de year whistle fer der pains? T'ain't right, Miss Ollie, t'ain't right; an' if wuss comes to wuss," the old woman's voice sank to a mysterious whisper, "you 'member my words, if wuss comes to wuss, Mister Eustis 'll hev hisseff t'blame for er heap ov it. I'm his friend, an' I'm yo' friend, I'm everbody's frien'," she added comprehensively, "but niggers is got t' live, en dey 'll do it by hook er by crook, ef dar ain' no better way."

A vague threat seemed to run through Judy's closing words, but Olga could make nothing especial out of them.

"Can't you trade your buttons off, Aunt Judy?" she said by way of bringing her back to the text.

Judy's face brightened. "I knowed it," she said triumphantly; "I tole de folks Miss Olgie would h'op a ole ooman out. Now, honey, ef yo'll just take dat peck er buttons off'n my hands, I'll make a rale good bargain wid yer. Dey's rale good buttons, dat dey is. Some, sho' nough, stylish ones 'mongst 'em. I'll give you de lot fur a cup er sugar, en a pint er rice, en a bar er washin' soap, en a leetle pinch er green tea, en 'bout er spoonful er soda, en, well, I say, honey, you couldn' let a ole ooman have a slice er ham, could yer, en a little piece er cheese. En I say, Miss Olgie," calling after her, as Olga started toward the store-room to hide her amusement and fill the varied order, "dem's rale good buttons; just fro' in any ole shawl you's done wid, please, ma'am, t'morrer's brother Rush Mo'ton's fun'al, en I'd lak to look lak I knowed w'at's w'at, you know, honey."

When Olga returned with the numerous packages done up in newspaper Aunt Judy was on her knees before the buttons, busy making selections; she looked up quite unabashed.

"I'se just pickin' out a lot er de black bone ones, honey, dat'll do t' go on de boys' breeches. I'll tote dem home in my pocket; en now, ef you'll empty de buttons out I'll tie de res' uv my passels up in de hank'cher, en blessed a bite uv any uv it, will Henry

Little git. De law!" Aunt Judy brought her hand out of the pocket where she had carried it full of buttons, with a letter in it. "Now you see Providence 'spired me t' put dem bone buttons in my pocket. Ef I had'n' I'd 'a' carried Miss Olgie's letter all de way back home wid me. Henry brought dis from Wes'on for you, honey, en it's a lan's wonder he did'n' lose it, for it wur in his hat en he wur reelin' wen he got home. Well, now, it's time I was makin' tracks fur home. Thank you, missy, it's real clever uv you t' holp a ole woman out dis way, but dem's good buttons, Miss Ollie, I don't know but you got a leetle de bes' uv de trade, but I can't eat buttons en I kin eat rice," with which incontrovertible statement Aunt Judy took her departure, leaving Olga to the undisturbed enjoyment of her letter.

It was from Miss Denton. In it she told her that she would be with her "bag and baggage" about two weeks from date. "We need each other, dearie, and two happier old maids it will be hard to find than you and I will be when we join forces to make a home for ourselves, the world forgetting, by the world forgot." And it was only by the burst of grateful tears that swelled up from her tired heart, in reading these closing words in the dear little woman's letter, that Olga knew how passionately she had been craving human companionship and human sympathy through all these desolate days of mute endurance.

She wished Miss Denton were there that very night so she could repeat to her Judy's vague threat or warning, which was it meant to be? and take counsel with her about it.

"If the worst comes to the worst, Mr. Eustis will have himself to blame."

What danger was threatening Eustis? What plan of evil was hatching in the ignorant heads of the people on his place? These creatures were slow to wrath, but when once moved, acted with the blind fury of goaded brutes. If she could only warn him or ward it off him or get hold of any thing tangible, so she might reason with these people, who were so steeped in moral ignorance that they could reason for themselves but from one standpoint and that a purely selfish one.

Whatever it was, for Eustis's sake she must exercise her acutest vigilance.

CHAPTER XXV.

STOLEN JOY.

A DEEP abiding gladness filled Olga's heart when Miss Denton was actually seated on the opposite side of the fire-place from her. "Come to stay," to enter into her life and be a part of it as she hoped, and as the little old lady said melodramatically: "until death did them part."

A restless fluttering sensation possessed poor Rose's entire being over the same event, and kept her hovering with nervous officiousness and hungry ears about the fire, that was already doing all that was in the power of blazing wood to do to keep the interior of the rude cabin ablaze with light and cheer.

That insensate woman in the chair there, maundering on about the bad roads and the rough springless wagon ride that had left every bone in her body aching, and the stupidity of the boat's captain, in putting her off at Hardlines landing instead of Weston, had come straight from the atmosphere made sacred in Rose's estimation, because her beautiful child had her being in it. Would Ginia's precious name ever drop from those garrulous lips?

She seized the hearth-broom in her worn, restless hands and began afresh to brush the red-brick hearth that was already guiltless of ashes or speck. Any thing to keep near the talker. Miss Denton spread two ample shoes close in front of the fire. The steam rose slowly from their damp soles. "Let me fetch you a pair of dry shoes and stockings, Miss Denton," says Rose, eagerly, but Miss Denton declined, "she would dry" quick enough before such a blaze. But the offer had served to loosen the tongue that had cloven dry and hot against the roof of Rose's mouth.

"And how did you leave the folks over in the hills? All the folks, ole Mrs. Stanhope, and Mr. Eustis and—and Miss Ginia?"

"All quite well, thank you, Rose," says Miss Denton, adding for Olga's benefit, "and all sent love to you, dear."

Olga's smile was a trifle bitter, but her "thank you," was simply spoken. "I wonder if Ginia misses me much?" she asks wistfully, her soft eyes dropping upon the dancing flames.

"I am afraid Ginia's a selfish little puss," says Miss Denton carelessly, and Rose turned from the fire-place to go back to the kitchen with murderous feelings in her heart, so she lost the next sentence,—"at the best, but I do believe she is genuinely devoted to you, and I think under different circumstances, I mean under cer-

tain influences you know, she may develop into a very affectionate sort of a woman. There is a great deal of good in her, but she is frivolous and weak. By the way, I'm afraid her extreme prettiness is doing serious damage—"

Olga's heart stood still. Would it ever beat again and allow her foolish tongue to ask the question trembling upon it? Fortunately Miss Denton resumed of her own accord, after making a careful examination of the edges of her damp skirts—

"Yes, Ginia has made a conquest! caught a beau! Guess who!"

Rose, setting the tea-table just behind their backs, for Olga's two-roomed cabin called for concentration, paused with her hands full of knives and forks and spoons. Not through the clatter of table-setting would she risk losing one item about her idol, her beautiful darling, her child that sat in the high places of the land.

"Mrs. Stanhope's son!" says Olga, offering her guess in a low and steady voice, but her eyes never left the dancing flames, and her slender fingers wound themselves tightly together.

"Eustis Stanhope! Margaret Stanhope's son! The last of the blue-blood Stanhopes fall in love with a—a —" Miss Denton paused in some confusion. Olga's face was aflame. But not as she fancied by reason of the slight put upon the charity girls whom Mrs. Stan-

hope had befriended. How beautiful the child looked with that rosy flush dyeing her smooth dark cheeks! with the dancing flames reflected back from her shining eyes! with her full red lips slightly parted in the agitation of her resentment, was it? On the contrary, it was an ecstatic moment to Olga. A moment in which she lost sight of the cabin's rough walls; lost hearing for Miss Denton's murmured apology; lost the memory of every thing, but of that never to be forgotten moment out yonder on the crumbling treacherous river bank, when she had been held in a passionate embrace by a pair of strong arms; when, for one wildly sweet second her head had rested on Eustis Stanhope's breast; when he was not the representative of Stanhope Hall and she was not old Dora's grand-daughter. No, then they were simply two loving hearts that had been swept into close clinging contact by the swift rushing current of destiny. True, it was only to be swept asunder as suddenly, like the helpless floating inanimate objects in the dark flowing river by which they stood, that came eddying and circling about each other for a fleet while, only to be rudely parted by some black intervening obstacle and separated forever to float in divided currents down to one ingulfing sea.

"No, indeed," she came out of her trance to hear Miss Denton say, "I don't think Eustis Stanhope will ever fall in love with any body. He is settling into an old bachelor groove very fast. But my precious Robert,

that I thought was so terribly sensible and really felt quite secure in entrusting the entire world's welfare to, has fallen hopelessly and helplessly in love with Ginia's eyes and her playing and her—oh! well, the dear only knows what does regulate these things. And Robert, you know, quite prides himself on his superiority to any conventional considerations. I don't know that I am putting it quite amiably, and, as long as I've given up the old house for all and good, I suppose I ought to be thankful enough to have him form such respectable plans for the future as an early marriage. It sounds like romantic nonsense to me, but he declares he is going to supervise her studies until she is eighteen and then marry her."

Around and around the table Rose walked as on sublimated air, now moving a fork, now wiping a cup, now twitching the cloth mechanically, now taking up something quite aimlessly, only to put it down in the same place. How wondrous sweet it all sounded in her ears! Her child carefully cared for, nurtured and cultured! Her child safe in the honorable haven of matrimony, before she was well out of her teens! Her nameless offspring—Mrs. Dr. Maddox! Miss Denton's steady flow of chat glided into another channel. It was no longer of any interest to Rose. She slipped out into the kitchen and presently the sound of her coffee mill penetrated to the little sitting-room. She was singing a lusty ditty to its accompaniment.

"To-morrow is your birthday, dearie, isn't it," said Miss Denton, making a trip to her trunks that had been placed against the wall in Olga's bed-room and coming back with the box in her hands wrapped about with a towel.

"Yes," said Olga bitterly, "but why should I remember it, unless indeed as an occasion for sack-cloth and ashes?"

"Does—does Rose ever talk about the time she left you at the asylum? Did she ever speak of leaving any thing there with you? We mustn't be afraid to talk plainly to each other, dear."

"We never talk of the past at all! Indeed she shrinks with such evident pain from any reminder, from me, of our mutual relations, that we have settled it as you see. I teach her, or try to teach her, to read and to think for herself, but she wearies like a dull child. She listens with interest when I read to her, and the Bible stories seem to hold her attention, but she will never be any thing more than a dull-witted, ignorant, docile child. But I think she is happy. I hope she is. I often hear her singing over her work as you hear her now. I wish I could ever feel like doing it. She often tells me I've been the cause of making her perfectly happy."

Miss Denton was planning a surprise. She timed it so as to unwind the towel just as Rose's thin stooping form appeared once more in the door-way. She placed the box conspicuously on the center table between herself

and Olga. Her piercing eyes were fixed upon the woman, but her words were addressed to the girl.

"Mrs. Stanhope told me, my dear, to say to you, that this box was given her at the asylum, as belonging to you. That the woman who left it there, your nurse, said it was to be given to you when you were grown."

Rose's face grew as livid as its nature would admit of. Her fingers loosened about the plate of biscuit she was bringing in and dropped it noisily on the table. Olga seized the box eagerly. Miss Denton's eyes never left Rose's face. She read agitation there. (Ginia had gone into town surreptitiously and had the picture repaired—the box was in perfect order and tied up as before. She had brought it promptly at Mrs. Stanhope's demand when Miss Denton had come to say good-by.) Rose slipped noiselessly out of the room to gain time to think! Suppose this box should reveal the truth! Should contain the story of Olga's parentage, where then would be her fair vision of happiness for Ginia? In her guilt and in her ignorance she never once paused to reflect that suspicion had never yet pointed to the fair faced girl who had borrowed her great beauty from a remoter ancestor than father or grandfather. Like the bird that flits before the wayfarer warding off danger from the nest whose existence is unsuspected, Rose spent her life sheltering her young whom none knew for hers. Her knees trembled under her as Olga's soft clear voice came out to her.

"Rose! Come, please!"

Rose's refuge at every approach of danger was in a lie! She would acknowledge to the box, if that was what they were calling her for, and swear that she put every thing in it, hoping they might be useful to her little girl. But suppose there was a letter!

But there was no letter! Crumpled in the folds of the silk dress in which Virginia had bedecked herself that rainy day, lay forgotten the faded little d'oyley that wrapped in jealous secrecy the letter written in the long ago by a dying mother, striving to project some help and comfort into the far future for her desolate little one.

She stood stolidly by Olga's side, as the knots of the twine strings were loosened one by one and the box top yielded to the girl's eager pressure.

"Do you remember this box, Rose?" There was a ring of tense anxiety in Olga's voice, as she asked this question. It seemed so incomprehensible a thing to her, that this poor slattern, with the dulled intellect and the almost animal sluggishness of comprehension, could be her mother, that, in spite of old Dora's vivid assertion of kinship; in spite of Rose's remorseful corroboration of her claims; in spite of her own renunciation and acceptance, she sometimes doubted and dared to hope. She knew now by the sick revulsion of her soul from hope to despair, as Rose answered sullenly but readily, how strong that hope had been.

"Of co'se I remember the box, my sweety! what for no?"

"You left it at the asylum, then?"

"Of co'se. Who else was there to leave it? I thought the things in it might come handy to you w'en you was growed up to be a lady, you see. You know, my sweety, it wor'n't none of my doings that you wos took away from the 'sylum where I knowed the folks would be good to you, and wouldn't make no difference betwix' you and the other chill'n—"

"I know, I know," says Olga hastily. What use in going back over the past. Ah! if Ginia had only consented to have come away without her! If she had never left the asylum!"

"Then Rose will remember all the things in the box," says Miss Denton, laying her train with what she regarded as masterly strategy, not taking into account that she was merely experimenting in duplicity, whereas Rose had been nourished on it all her life.

"How you s'pose I'm goin' t' carry a lot of gimcracks in my head all these years, Miss Denton? Haven't I gone through enough to make a woman forget her own name since I put that box at the 'sylum in Cleveland?"

"My poor Rose, I expect you have," says Olga soothingly. Her hand rested on the heavy ambrotype case. She pressed the spring and the two sides fell back, showing in either lid the soft oval face of a

beautiful, but intensely sad looking woman, and of a black browed man from whose bold eyes and sneering lips Olga turned away in involuntary loathing, to fasten her surprised eyes on Rose. Miss Denton sat close at her elbow looking over one shoulder, while Rose looked over the other.

"Who is that bad looking man, Rose, and that sweet sad lady? And what are they doing in my box?"

This short period of inspection had been long enough to prepare Rose's ready imagination for the test.

"Them's pictures I thought a heap of, my sweety, oncet upon a time, though of course they's nothing but so much rubbish to you. That's Mr. Major Washburne, that I went up the river with the first time I left you, Miss Denton, during the war, and his wife. She was a mighty sweet lady, but sickly, and I tended her on the boat. She give me that picture, because she said she didn't want no picture that made her husband look so fierce."

This was not all pure invention. It was simply a clever adjustment of some half-forgotten experiences of Rose's nomadic days to the exigencies of the present. She had an equally plausible description of each article as Olga brought it to view. The box was empty finally, and they were no wiser, nor was any one the happier, unless, indeed, it was Rose.

"Was it worth hoarding all these years?" asked

Olga, smiling sadly into the loving sympathetic face so close to her.

To which Miss Denton replied with deceitful cheerfulness:

"Well, we will have to take out the pretty little gold watch and call it your birth-day present."

Olga looked at her indignantly. "And this from you?"

"Mercy, child! what have I done to make you look so savage?"

"Did that poor woman (Rose had gladly retreated once more), ever come by any thing honestly?"

"Oh! now, my dear child, that is entirely too sweeping. Of course she did. Don't you know that Rose lived a great many years as the wife of a barber"—

But a groan from Olga made her pause. The poor child's head had fallen upon her clasped hands and hot tears were trickling between the slim fingers.

"Oh! the disgrace of it! Oh! the burden of it! Oh! the cruelty of it!" she moaned over and over again, until Miss Denton, gathering her close to her great warm heart, sobbed with her and murmured words of endearment into the desolate ears and loved her and comforted her.

Miss Denton was given to asking straightforward questions with a bluntness that would have misled those who did not know about that great warm heart.

She asked one this night, later on, when she and Olga were preparing to go to bed.

"Do you see any thing of the Trowbridges, child?"

"Mrs. Trowbridge made several ineffectual efforts to be good to me when I first settled here, but I knew that she was under a misapprehension, and I would not avail myself of her kindness. She thinks of me as a quixotic girl who is carrying out a fancied mission of regeneration for an inferior race."

"Humph!" Miss Denton ejaculated, as she plaited her hair for the night with active fingers. "You know we are sort of kin."

"Who? you and Mrs. Trowbridge?"

"No. Waring and I."

"I never see him any nearer than the road," says Olga, icily. "He rides by on his way to Hardlines sometimes. He attends to the place, you know."

"Yes, I know."

And this brought Aunt Judy Little's vague threat back into Olga's mind. Strange how the words haunted her:

"If the worst comes to the worst, Mr. Eustis will have nobody but himself to thank for it."

She would not tell Miss Denton about it to-night. The day had been full enough of unusual excitement for all of them. To-morrow would be time enough! A little more desultory talk and then—Shep was the only thing left awake.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TO-MORROW AND TO-MORROW.

BUT with the return of day-light and the unusual circumstance of having a more companionable friend at hand than Rose, and the novelty of discussing her plans for the future enlargement of her night-school, and the starting of a sewing-school, Olga once more forgot the old woman's croaking words.

There was so much to do that first day! There was all Miss Denton's luggage and baggage to be assigned to permanent positions. There was the lightest corner in the little sitting-room to be cleared out for the accommodation of the dear old lady's writing desk and sewing machine and private easy chair.

"Miss Denton's corner," said Olga authoritatively, to Rose, as they planted the best rug in the house before the big easy chair. "Aren't you glad she's come to live with us, Rose?"

"I am for true, my chile. Miss Denton's a good woman. An' she's a smart one. She's got all that's in the books right at her finger ends. Learnin's a great thing, ain't it, sweety?" It was a wistful question, rather than an assertion, and Olga answered with

infinite gentleness, "Goodness is a better thing, Rose. And you know," she says, always ready with good seed to drop upon this stony ground, "if we can not all be learned, we can all be good. God won't ask how much have you learned, only, how much have you loved when He calls us home."

"But the goodness would come the easier for the knowin', wouldn't it, honey? You reckon He'll be as hard on us in judgment day, us—not you and her but the colored folks—that just sinned because we didn't know sin was sinful, as He will on them that's had the books and the preachers all to themselves for so long? Oh! my chile, you studies your Bible 'nough to find out what He does mean and what He does want. Is He goin' to punish me in the lake of everlastin' fire for doin' one thing way back yonder that's brought misery on so many folks and ain' done with it yet, when nary voice was ever raised to say, 'Rose, don't do that, it'll make the Lord your Maker angry?' Is He, Olga, my chile?"

A violent fit of coughing checked the rapid flow of her words. Olga had never before seen her so wrought up. She was at a loss to account for it. The woman was evidently suffering under tremendous excitement of some sort. Her normal condition was that of almost sluggish acceptance of her fate as it was, tinctured with remorseful affection for Olga, for whose physical comfort she exerted her best efforts and

toward whom she maintained an attitude of adoring gratitude.

"You are not well this morning. You look feverish." (She did indeed look worn and haggard in the extreme.) "You ought to lie down, Rose."

But Rose answered petulantly. "Yes, I am well. There ain't nothing in this world the matter with me only sometimes my head gets to aching with all the fret that's tangled up in it. I wish I'd had the show in my young days that the folks's young ones has to-day. They'll all know how to think for themselves, them that's growin' up, and if they turn away from the light and prefers the dark, it will be of their own free wills. Chile," with violent change of subject and manner, "I don't feel called on to look after w'ite folks' business, but you write to Mr. Eustis and tell him things ain' goin' straight on Hardlines. I ain' goin' to tell you nothin' more but just that much. And that's enough to fix me wid the folks if they knew. But I can't find it in my heart not to give leastways a hint to them, for they've been good to—to—you and to Miss Ginia, the Hall folks have."

Through the window she saw Miss Denton, who had wandered out into the little yard to locate a poultry house, with Reuben's assistance, approaching. She looked into Olga's face anxiously, "You won't tell on me, honey? The folks would conjure me 'fore to-morrow night, if they knowed."

Rose disappeared through the back door as Miss Denton entered through the front. As she settled herself into her corner, Olga fluttering about the room, giving those nice finishing touches that Rose always left to her, repeated the substance of what she had just heard, supplementing it by an account of Aunt Judy's vague warning.

"My dear," said Miss Denton oracularly, "if you had lived in the South as long as I have, you'd let such nonsense go in at one ear and out at the other. The memory of man goeth not to the contrary when such vague and vengeful mutterings have not got afloat whenever things were not going to suit the people on the place. As I understand it, your friend Judy's husband had gone to Weston, got tipsy, brought her back a peck of buttons for which she had no earthly use and which had an irritating effect on the old lady's nerves, hence those mutterings which are kept cut and dried for all occasions of discontent. In their ignorance and child-like helplessness the colored people hold the nearest white people morally responsible for every mishap that befalls them, from overflows down to buttons."

"And are they not so to a greater degree than they are willing to acknowledge to themselves?" asks Olga gravely. "Is it not Mr. Stanhope's fault that his gin swarms with merciless creditors, ready to pounce upon the last bale of cotton, or the last sack of seed that the

laborer can lay claim to, after his lease for the land is secured? Do you wonder much at their discouragement, Miss Denton?"

"Well, but, my dear Olga, you would not have them shirk a just debt. You don't want to civilize them up to the fine point of repudiation, do you? That is reserved for States and politicians, yet awhile," says Miss Denton with merry scorn in her eyes. She, too, regarded Olga as bent upon establishing Utopia on impossible ground.

"No," says Olga, with sweet seriousness of voice and eye, "I would not have them shirk a just debt, but I would have them protected against the incurring of foolish ones."

"But their own common sense ought to be their protection in such matters."

"Common sense totally unenlightened either by precept or example, would not carry any of us to the pinnacle of earthly wisdom. They are nothing but a horde of grown up children so far as worldly wisdom is concerned, before whom temptation is placed in its most alluring form, and toward which they are urged by the most unscrupulous leaders. If a man has a political or a commercial end to gain with one of these poor, untaught citizens, he manages him through his appetites and his weaknesses, and when his end is accomplished, throws the useless tool aside, with no thought nor care for the rough and jagged edge he may have put

upon it. But some one else will suffer from that rough and jagged edge, Miss Denton."

Miss Denton made a wry face: "My dear child, how exceedingly croaky you do sound. What are you going to do about it?"

"What am I going to do about it?" said Olga in a burst of passionate reproach. "What indeed can a feeble, powerless girl do? Rather ask what are the men of the country going to do about it? Why are they leaving the task of educating the negroes to people almost as ignorant as themselves, whose one inducement to take the position is to secure the fast accumulating school taxes as their emolument? Why do they wink at, if not encourage, the drainage of their plantation revenues into the vile little shops that dot the land over like plague spots? You ask in sarcasm what am I going to do about it, and I answer you in helpless seriousness, nothing! Nothing but to try to teach those who are growing up to place a truer estimate upon their own abilities and responsibilities as human beings with souls to save, and prospective social importance to be prepared for. Nothing, except to work with them, and pray for them that God will lead them not into temptation, but will deliver them from evil."

"Mercy, what a pair of revolutionizers, or reformers, or enthusiasts, no offense, my dear, you and my Bob are, to be sure! You are a pair of self-constituted

young Atlases, and I'm sure I wish you joy of your burden. Now then about our chicken house! As a rule, raising poultry on a plantation is somewhat discouraging. These dear clumsy protégés of yours have peculiarly dense views concerning the rights of property in chickens. They can always grasp the idea of meum, but seldom of tuum. But we must risk something. They would have to be the blackest of ingrates to rob your hen-roost."

Olga laughed indulgently, and permitted herself to be drawn into an animated discussion about the hen-house, Reuben being brought in to contribute his quota of advice and experience. And so, the brightest and shortest day she had yet spent in the cabin in the woods drew to its close, and night shut them in once more from an outlook, which, at its best, could never be other than gloomy.

When Rose brought in the lighted lamp, and placed it on the center table, her face was white and scared, and her voice sounded hoarse with excitement, as she bent toward Olga saying:

"Hardlines' gin-house's on fire! I told you so!"

The two women were upon their feet and out on the front gallery in a second. Not a word was spoken between them for many minutes. Over the crowns of the leafless trees they could see the lurid flames dancing and leaping up against the black background of the starless sky! They could hear the crackling of the dry

and combustible wood of which the building was composed, and the falling of the heavier timbers, as they quickly burned through. Along the rain-soaked road dark forms on panting mules, which were urged forward by blow and word, sped by in ever increasing numbers. It was the people from Bendemma hastening to the scene of excitement. The sound of a footfall near at hand caught Olga's ear.

"Is that you, Uncle Reuben?" she asked, leaning over the gallery toward the sound.

"Hit's me, missy," Reuben answered out of the dark.

"Saddle your mule and my pony immediately," she said imperatively, "and bring them round to the steps. Make haste please, Uncle Reuben," gliding into sudden entreaty.

"Olga, what are you daring now?" said Miss Denton, clutching her by the arm, as she turned hurriedly to enter the house.

"I am daring nothing. But I am going up to the house at Hardlines. They will fire it next. Don't detain me, please, I want to get my riding skirt and hat by the time Reuben saddles the pony."

But Miss Denton maintained a vigorous hold on her arm until Rose said with scornful emphasis:

"Ef de folks wanted to do the child a hurt, ain't they had all the chance they needed all 'long? There ain't a man or a woman but w'at'd risk their necks to keep harm from her, as far as that goes."

Nevertheless the little old lady was sorely disquieted when the dauntless girl, mounted on her fleet little pony, dashed far ahead of Reuben and disappeared in the gloom of the wagon road about which now a lurid light was flitting that only intensified its dreariness. Miss Denton paced the short gallery with nervous strides, now facing toward the dancing, licking flames that were fast reducing the costly gin-house to a heap of ruin, now toward the fields where the stubble of last year's corn and cotton were brought out in distinctness in the borrowed light of the conflagration.

"I wish I could have gone with her," she said anxiously to Rose, who leaned immovably against the gallery post, with her haggard eyes fixed on the fire in a sort of fascination.

"I tell you she's safe, Miss Denton," Rose answered with asperity. "She's a saint and God don't 'low common folks to pester his chill'n. She could walk through the fiery furnace if she'd a mind to."

Doubtful theology and doubtful comfort, but the best to be obtained under the circumstances!

The gin-house was but a mile from Olga's cabin, the residence a mile and a half further on toward the river. The road she was following left the conflagation some rods to her left, but she had no errand there. Toward the low-roofed house whose gables stood distinctly silhouetted against the black sky she galloped rapidly, Reuben behind her making what speed he could on

his slower mule. If the malice that had dictated the burning of Eustis's gin-house had, also, planned the destruction of the residence at Hardlines, Olga felt sure the incendiaries would turn their attention in that direction so soon as the first paralysis of terror at their own rashness in firing the gin-house should have passed away. She must be there before them. Her pony entered into the spirit of the race and fairly flew along the familiar route.

A shadowy steed surmounted by a shadowy rider, whose long draperies fluttered in the speed-made wind raced by her side, neck and neck! It was the flame-made shadow of herself and the pony, projected along the fire-lit road. She could see, by the turn of her head, a confused crowd of men and mules and horses moving restlessly and gesticulating wildly about the doomed building. There was nothing to do there. No means of fighting the fire-fiend. Some few, whose zeal outstripped judgment, had come armed with buckets, that were simply useless unless in warding off suspicion from the bearers of them. The sashes in the windows of the little house toward which Olga was speeding glittered like tin, where the light fell upon them through unclosed shutters. How lonely and gruesome it all looked, as she cantered into the back yard, dismounted and stood upon the low back gallery holding the bridle waiting for Reuben to come up! She had never been to the house since her sad leave-

taking of Mrs. Stanhope and Ginia when they went back to the stately old Hall over in the hills and she—to take up her cross in the cabin in the woods. She had never seen Eustis since that parting on the river's brink. She hoped she might never have to do so again. None-the-less would she gladly serve his interest at any peril. But there was really no peril involved in this errand. Should danger threaten her, she would go to rather than shun, these same misguided passion-blinded men who were trying to right many wrongs by committing still greater ones. In spite of their profound ignorance, (because of which they were liable to fall into just such terrible mistakes, as this burning of the Hardlines gin-house), she believed there was a deep-seated sense of justice in the negro heart, that made him docile and manageable by the proper influences. Alas for the scarcity of that sort of influence!

"Take the pony into the stable, please, Uncle Reuben," she said, yielding the bridle to the old man. "He is too hot to be left exposed just now. Then come back to me here."

"What you gwine t' do, missy?" Reuben asked—not questioning but that she would do the right thing, only a trifle curious.

"I am going to stay here until morning," she said; "that is, provided the doors are unlocked. Aunt Nancy sleeps in the gallery room, you know. She's at the fire now, of course."

Reuben walked away with the two beasts. Olga was left standing on the gallery by herself. Around her stretched hundreds of acres of brown cotton stalks, from whence the last ragged remnant of the staple had long since been picked. It was a dismal outlook. She faced the burning gin, about which the restless dark figures, perpetually shifting their positions, looked not unlike a gathering of witches about a huge smoking caldron. When the sound of the pony's footfalls died away the stillness was deathlike. Reuben would be out there in the lot for quite a while, for he never lost an opportunity to feed his own mule at somebody else's expense. There was a carpenter's tool-chest on the gallery, which furnished her a seat. She was very tired, now that the excitement of reaching the house before harm did was passing away. She seated herself on the chest to watch and wait. When Nancy came to go to bed she would go into the house. Still the crowd thickened and surged about the gin. The roof and the heavier timbers fell in with a terrific crash, and clouds of dense black smoke for a while obscured and obliterated the dazzling spectacle. It was in this second of darkness that Olga caught the first stealthy footfall of some one walking around the house. She stepped noiselessly to the end of the gallery and peered over. A dark form was stooping on the ground close under the front windows and bending forward to adjust something under the house. There was an open space

between the ground and the house, which stood some two feet above the surface. Doubtless, whoever it was, he was preparing combustibles for its destruction. An intense desire to identify the incendiary kept Olga motionless. The material prepared to his entire satisfaction, the stooping man scratched a match upon his knees! She could see the phosphorescent streak it made, but no light followed. Another—it flickered into a flame but died as suddenly, as he stretched forth his hand with reckless haste. A third! and the flame, sheltered by his hat, this time waxed strong enough to be sent on its deadly mission. It illumined the man's face distinctly.

"Ephraim!" She caught her breath in silent terror after that one call. How much harm he had it in his power to do her! After all, this was a rash errand. Clearly and distinctly his name rang out upon the night air! The match dropped from the incendiary's unnerved hand and expired sinlessly. No words followed that bell-like call. No form was visible to the frightened wretch, crouching there on the hard ground in abject terror of what to him sounded like a trumpet call to repentance from the skies that overspread him, so black and weird in their starless expanse, that Ephraim almost looked for a thunderbolt to descend and smite him where he kneeled! Olga could hear his voice raised in sudden and fervent supplication for pardon for his meditated crime. She had designed no

play upon the superstitious terrors of the negro. His name had escaped her involuntarily at the moment of recognition. But if God had indeed called him to repentance through her, then let the leaven work. His trembling voice came to her laden with the pathetic plea:

"Oh Lord, be please to pardon ole Eph'm for de sin dat he was 'bout to do! Oh Lord, be please to 'cept ole Eph'm's thanks for dat Thou hast call to him out uv de darkniss, as Thou done call to Sam'el long years ago. Mout be mo'n a hundred years, Lord, fur all Eph'm knows, for he don' know nothin', Lord. But he do know 'nuff to know dat burnin' up gins and w'ite folks' houses ain' not de strait an' narrer way t' clim' to de great w'ite throne. Oh Lord, be please to forgive Eph'm dis time, an' he won' git in no such fix ag'in, no matter ef he do fin' hisself gittin' po'er en po'er, en older en older, en tireder en tireder ev'ry day uv his life. Oh Lord, be please teach a po' ignunt nigger how t' say dy will be done, an' ho'p him to mean it, too. Now, Lord, Eph'm's gwine home, en gwine t' bed, an' when judgment day comes he gwine to say oncet mo' thank de Lord for sendin' a voice out'n de darkness to stop me from de raskillest piece uv work I ever ho'ped on."

He rose to his feet laboriously. Olga could see him moving away toward the front gate, with bowed head and hands folded penitentially. Eustis's house

was safe enough now. Once let Ephraim's version of supernatural protection get afloat and no inducement strong enough to raise another hand against it could be framed. If Reuben would only come from the lot she could safely go back home immediately and relieve Miss Denton's anxiety. She would like to take a peep into the little sitting-room as long as she was here. No one ever locked up in that locality. Doubtless she could get in through Nancy's room. She found no impediment in her way. Through Nancy's room, on the gallery, she passed into the dining-room, (she knew every turn of the house as well in the dark as in the light), thence, into the hall, where she was surprised to see a streak of light issuing from under the sitting-room door. Could Nancy be so faithless as to occupy the best room in the house, in the absence of the family? She opened the door and found that the light was shed by a lamp whose badly smoked chimney reduced the illumination to a dingy twilight. To her surprise, and consternation, the room showed signs of recent and masculine occupancy. There were two valises only partially unpacked, guns, rubber over-coats and umbrellas scattered about as if the arrivals had been very recent. She had scarcely taken in all these startling details when a loud stamping of feet on the front gallery added to her terror. There was no escaping now unless she chose to fly like some guilty interloper. She was certain she recognized Eustis Stan-

hope's step, but that other? what matter who that other! The door opened upon her as she stood there almost defiantly erect, holding up her heavy riding skirt in one little gauntleted hand, while her large serious eyes were fearlessly directed toward the door. It was Eustis who entered, followed closely by Dr. Maddox. Both men started in surprise at sight of her, while the lantern that Eustis had been holding in a loose hand swayed and fell to the ground with a crash.

"Olga! Little Olga!" It was almost a cry.

She had the advantage of him by that moment of preparation. After all, why should she quail before this man as if she were guilty of some wrong doing? Why should they not face the future, blank as it was, with the courage that comes of right striving and right doing? Young as she was, life had already become too earnest a thing to Olga Seleman to be frittered away in useless repinings. That other presence made it easier for her to speak words of common-place explanation:

"I did not know you were on this side of the river, Mr. Stanhope, or I would not have been so officious. I have feared something of this kind was brewing, but had nothing tangible to go on, or would have written you. My people," here her eyes darkened and dilated and her voice that had been tremulous grew suddenly metallic, "will let me say any thing to them and they obey my voice. When I discovered your gin-house

was on fire I fancied they would destroy this house too. It was to prevent it that I came." (She did not tell him that she had prevented it.)

"Alone! child!"

Her sweet voice had seemed to come to him across a wide gulf. How harsh and senseless and inadequate his own words sounded by contrast!

"No, not alone," she said, moving quietly toward the door, there stopping to add, "Uncle Reuben came with me. Good-by! You will let me tell you how sorry I am for your loss, will you not?"

He was devouring her with his hungry eyes. From the low white forehead slightly prominent over the fine dark line of her brows; from the soft eyes that glowed now with a pity almost divine; down to the little foot whose arched instep peeped from under the up-lifted riding skirt, she was altogether lovely in his eyes. He came out of a trance of passionate longing and regret to say stupidly:

"What loss?"

"Your beautiful stately gin-house."

"Curse the gin-house. Maddox and I are just from the enjoyment of the spectacular drama. A few thousand dollars can wipe out that loss."

She was out of the door now, would soon be beyond reach of his thanks for her heroism. What a clumsy brute he was, what an angel she! With long strides he went after her and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

She could feel the tremor that thrilled through his strong frame. She could hear the vibrant pain in his beloved voice:

"I want to take you home, Olga, if you will let me."

"No!" She erected a sudden icy barrier between them.

"You are not afraid of me?" he said with bitter emphasis. "You, the dauntless heroine of a perilous ride in the night time to save a pile of worthless timber? It was a piece of folly, your coming, but—I thank you for it. God bless you, child."

"Thank me for a piece of folly?" she said in lighter vein. She would gladly obliterate the intense past in a practical present. Eustis caught the infection of her courage and answered more composedly:

"Thank you for making it easier for me to do what I came over here to do, Olga."

"And that is—?"

"And that is to lighten your burden if I can. To consecrate my life to the same ends. To offer you such help, in your self-appointed task, as your superior judgment shall dictate. To ask permission to be your co-worker in the cause you have espoused with bravery that makes me know myself for a craven and a cumberer of the earth. Oh! my little girl, if we can but clasp comrade hands over the dark gulf that separates us, life will not be so hueless to me as it is at present."

She did not answer him immediately; when she did there was almost a sob in her voice: "It is a good thing to learn to live without the sunshine, dear friend. It is a better to find the sunshine where at first sight seem only storm-clouds. I shall go home as happy as a child on Christmas night because of the brave friendly words you have spoken." She put her hand in his and he clasped it fearlessly, as he said—"Maddox and I will come to your home in the morning."

Reuben was waiting by the gallery with the pony. Eustis helped her into the saddle, then stood where she had left him, until the sound of her pony's hoofs died away in the far distance. Then he went back to Robert Maddox.

"In the name of all that is majestic who is that girl?" asked Robert, as soon as he appeared in the door-way, "I'm consumed with curiosity."

"That is Miss Seleman. I told you of her."

"That beautiful creature is—"

"The outcast child of a mulatto mother!" says Eustis in passionate tones. "The sin offering for an accursed generation! A lamb without blemish! A creature in whom is no guile, and, yet—doomed."

"Doomed, according to the conventionalities of society, Eustis, yes. But, in the eyes of Him who seeth not as man seeth, a vessel chosen to honor. Peace be with her."

And Eustis said—Amen!

CHAPTER XXVII.

CO-WORKERS.

PERHAPS if obstacles of an ordinary nature, such as are perpetually fretting the current of true love, had come between Eustis Stanhope and Olga it would have been much harder for them to meet on the plain of a common interest in a common cause as they did now meet, through the energetic action of Robert Maddox.

To know Olga sprung from the race his ancestors had held in centuries of bondage (a bondage whose righteousness Eustis had never once questioned), was to know her forever dead to him, in the way he had loved to think of her, even when to him she was but a penniless, nameless charity girl whose peerless worth had come between him and all his carefully nurtured prejudices of name and station. If the line of demarkation between them had been narrower, so narrow that there was danger of his overstepping it in a moment of forgetfulness or of longing, he might have needed to be more cautious. As it was the gulf was so awful, so wide, so utterly impassable, that he could safely "hold up her hands" in the work to which she had bravely dedicated her young life. He felt somewhat as if he were

acting as executor for the love that had been slain, in ministering to her necessities in this new life of hers.

And now, Robert, with his fresh importation of breezy vigorous views on the problem of to-day, had, metaphorically speaking, shaken him by the shoulders until he stood aroused to the fact that there was a great deal needing to be done, and somebody must needs be doing it, and no one was better fitted than himself by age and position to do it: Robert's arguments had been as vigorous as his own broad-shouldered, big-chested, clear-headed self:

"Come, go with me over to Hardlines, Eustis, and let us investigate things. You don't half appreciate your own privileges, man. Here you are, the sole representative of one of the oldest families in the South, your own master in every respect, a deal better off, financially, than nine-tenths of us poor broken up ex-rebels, and a move from you, an active move, would carry such tremendous weight over in your own parish, and yet you sit stock still, deaf and dumb and blind to your own best intesests."

"What sort of move, Rob?" Eustis had asked with only half-aroused interest. (Robert, he decided, was certainly a monomanaic on this subject, but, after all, it was rather refreshing, amid the universal stagnation, to find a fellow who could get in earnest over any thing, even if it was over a lot of "woolly heads" who were doing well enough.)

"Why, I want you to go over to Hardlines and turn things upside-down."

"By George, if things are not already upside-down enough to please you, fanatic as you are, you are confoundly radical in your desires! I hope you don't feel any premonitory symptoms of socialism, or communism, or any thing of that sort, you know, Bob?"

"If I do," said Robert, with a light laugh, "you are safe enough from infection; you are too thoroughly inoculated with inherited notions to dread the closest contact with the most violent case of socialism. But come, don't shy like an unbroken colt, if I don't happen to use the identical phraseology, or express the identical views about the darkeys held in honor by your revered great-grandfather, Judge Jeremiah Stanhope of Stanhope Hall. The world is moving, Eustis, wake up, man! open your eyes to the fact that it is moving with titanic strides, at that. You don't care to be left in the sands like an old skiff not worth the cobbling up, do you?"

"I really can't see what I can do to avoid just that catastrophe," says Eustis, passing from languid indifference into bitter complaining; "my life seems to have been made or marred beyond my own control. I came home with an average stock of enthusiasms and intentions. But—well—hang it all, you see for yourself."

"Of course I see for myself. I see a man, in the early prime of his life, settling down to an existence of

ennui and uselessness simply because an overruling Providence has dared to interfere with the plan of life he had mapped out for himself. I see a man flinging away his golden opportunity because it does not come to him just when and how he had pre-ordained it for himself. I see a man, child rather, who, because he has cried for the moon that he couldn't get refuses to be consoled with the green-cheese that he can get."

"Oh! I say, hold up, Bob, can't you? You are getting a little rough on a fellow. I'm not such a duffer as you'd make me out."

"No," Robert answered placidly, "I don't intend to hold up until I get my own way. I never do. It is one of the rules I have laid down for my own guidance through life."

"The deuce you have! And yet here you have been lecturing me for rebelling at not having mine in any respect."

"With this slight difference," said Robert, with a smile of almost womanly sweetness. "You want to have your way with God. I intend to have my way with man. If we put it on the very lowest grounds, Eu, it is the part of common sense to accept the inevitable gracefully. But I don't want to put it on the lowest grounds with you, old chap. I want to put it on the very highest. And I don't want you to fling away your chances because of some disappointments that have come to you in your undisciplined years."

"You've mistaken your profession, Bob. But come, now, cut short the preaching and tell me what you want me to do."

"As an initial step I want you to go over to Hardlines and master the situation there. Unfortunately, I have no plantation of my own to experiment on, so I have to borrow from my neighbors."

"But, confound your assumption, I have mastered the situation in Hardlines. Don't you suppose I pay any attention to my own business?"

"The question is, what do you call your own business? I'll wager you know how much cotton to a pound of lint belongs to you and to your merchant and to each squad. Of course you know the condition of your work-mules; and the quantity of rations consumed by man and beast, for the calendar year. And, perhaps, you know in a general way which ones of your hands are getting along so smoothly that they will own their own teams next year, and which ones will leave before this crop is picked out. I will even go further to your credit side. You may know that the meeting house on Hardlines has the most room and the tightest roof and the best supplied pulpit in the parish."

"And if that does not cover the entire ground," Eustis says triumphantly, "I'd like to know what will."

"Cover the entire ground! No, sir." Dr. Maddox got up from his chair to pace the room, with his hands

in his trowsers pockets, as he always did when his feelings threatened to get the better of him. "No, sir," he repeated, emphatically, "it does not begin to cover the entire ground. At the close of the war it was expected that the negro race would gradually disperse throughout the United States, and, by becoming absorbed, as it were, lose all identity, all significance, we may say. I think we of the South, in our then discontented frame of mind rather hoped there would be a grand hegira northward. We saw in our newly-freed slaves a sort of infernal machine with limitless capabilities for harm, from which all restraining influences had been removed and which we hardly knew how to handle. We wanted the North, that had been so active in freeing him, to have the full benefit of his ignorance and helplessness and worthlessness. We thought he had been spoiled as a laborer, and we considered him an abortion as a citizen. His first clumsy efforts in an educational way were excessively funny to us; we saw only its burlesque side. We naturally and bitterly resented the fact of emancipation, and visited it upon its ignorant beneficiaries by a cold and sullen acceptance of what we could not ignore. Absorbed in self-pity for our own shattered fortunes, we could not form a fair and just estimate of his naked and shelterless condition, suddenly taken from under the careful guardianship of his old masters to be placed upon the bleak pinnacle of citizenship and told to look out for

himself. He could not look out for himself, Eu, and we were too wrapped up in gloomy retrospection to look out for him properly. Small wonder, then, that the horrors of the carpet-bag episode should intervene."

"I don't see yet," says Eustis, resentfully, "that we of the South are called upon to do any thing more than we have done. It is too much to ask that, impoverished as we are, bowed down by every species of calamity, we should yet undertake, unaided, the education of millions of blacks. By every rule of right and justice this should be the undertaking of the National Government. The responsibility of emancipation lies at its door: let it, also, assume that of enlightenment."

"But if it won't, Eustis?"

"Well, then, I suppose we'll scramble on in the same old slovenly fashion."

"You may well say the same 'old slovenly fashion.' The negro restless, uneasy and suspicious; the white man commercially just enough, but totally unsympathetic, feeling that he has grievances, but hopeless of remedies. Seeing in the negro only a very unsatisfactory sort of utensil."

"And, by George! we have grievances, and I am hopeless of remedies."

"That is simply because you are hopeless on general principles. If we would only bring it down to a question of expediency we would do better. I think time

has practically demonstrated the fact that the negro will not migrate from the South. We are bound together by indissoluble ties of common interests, common associations and climatic preferences. This much granted, no one but a fool would object to using every means for bettering the moral and mental status of the race. We will be the greater sufferers by a contrary policy. It is not enough that they have teachers and teaching. It behooves us to see that they have the right sort of teaching; teaching that will not leave them satisfied with a few imitative acquirements and a smattering of book learning, but such as will go deep down to the bed-rock of their moral ignorance. Teaching that will penetrate the dense fog that envelops their benighted souls and shed thereon the light of Christian intelligence, love and fellowship. Teachers who, by making them strong and self-respecting, will elevate them to that plane where the white man of the South can recognize in the black man of the South an efficient and manly co-worker in interests that must always remain one; where the white woman of the South can see something more in the black woman of the South than the poor, untaught slattern, whose shortcomings are now simply matters of course, either to be fretted over or laughed at, and whose want of virtue can be condoned with criminal ease."

It was impossible to listen to this young enthusiast, whose burning plea for a race was always enhanced by

the flashing of his great blue eyes, and the defiant attitude of an athlete, without catching the infection of his earnestness. Eustis was fired now to the point of saying, tragically, while he laughed in his friend's excited face:

"Take me! Use me. As the clay in the potter's hands so will I be in thine. Oh! most noble enthusiast! Oh! most insufferable of bores."

"Done!" says Robert, laughingly accepting his rather incongruous titles. "I shall proceed to transport my clay to Hardlines."

So, this is the way "the boys," as Mrs. Stanhope and Miss Denton still persisted in calling these two young stalwarts, came to be over at Hardlines on the night of the gin-house burning.

"It is your baptism of fire, my boy," says Robert, as they halted their horses near the still smoking ruins the next day, "from which you'll come out purified and strengthened." Then they rode on silently until they neared the cabin that Olga called home.

"If I could but take the grandly impersonal views of life that child takes," says Eustis, "all might be well with me."

"All will be well with you, old friend," Robert answers affectionately, "now that you've found an object in life. A man without an object in life is infinitely worse off than Peter Schemill was." * * *

"Maddox and you have spent more thought on this

subject in a week than I have in all my useless life," says Eustis to Olga, introducing his friend and his errand simultaneously, "but, whatever plans you agree upon, I am humbly bent upon forwarding to the best of my ability personally and financially. You may rely upon me."

(It was a fine thing to do! It was a fine thing to see! It always is a fine thing to see a man put self down with a strong hand and rise to full recognition of the master-fact that he is indeed but as clay in the potter's hand. But oh! the infinite goodness and justness and tenderness of the great Potter!)

"You," said Olga to Dr. Maddox, with the simple directness that gave all her utterances such an air of well digested thought, "look upon this question from the broader and more elevated platform of the political economist. You are looking into the remote possibilities of the negro's life as a responsible citizen of the New South. I, from my more contracted point of vision, only reach out to him, or want to, the daily help he so much needs for daily guidance."

"Which is good theology and better wisdom," says Robert, smiling into the sweet face of his girlish coadjutor. "Let the things of to-morrow take care of themselves. Whosoever teaches the colored boy of to-day to cast up his accounts correctly, to recognize that others have rights of property which he must respect, or to detest a lie, is laying the foundation for his future

success as a citizen on solid rock, or whosoever teaches the colored girl of to-day that it is more honorable and praiseworthy to learn how to keep her home neat, or how to cut and make her own dresses (rather than bedeck herself with second-hand finery), or that a well-cooked meal is more to her credit than a badly played tune, is laying the foundation for an increase of virtue and dignity in the entire race. These are the small things of to-day, which, well seen to, may safely be entrusted to solve the greater problem of his citizenship, about which so much type is used and upon which so little enlightenment is being shed."

Then Olga laid before her two unexpected aids all the plans that had been shaping and forming themselves in her longing imagination all through the lonely months of this last year, while little Miss Denton listened and smiled and muttered—Utopia!

There were those who said, (when these plans rapidly took shape under the vigorous policy instituted by Eustis Stanhope on his own place), that "Eustis Stanhope had fallen under the evil influence of a crack-brained enthusiast fresh from the atmosphere of radicalism (that was poor Bob!) and would soon swamp himself with his schools for men at night and for boys in day-time, with his industrial schools and his sewing schools and other "advanced nonsense."

There were those who wished him and his revolutionary plans at the deuce, for popularizing Hardlines.

There were those who looked on with aroused and curious interest, prepared to "follow suit" in case "it paid."

There were those who sneered at what came to be called the Hardlines policy, with a sourness that had its roots in the ineradicable conviction that the blow that struck the shackles from the slave had only riveted them upon his master. Who saw the word *finis* written to all things lovely in the South. Who mourned the Old South as a slain divinity and accepted the New South as a plebeian caricature. Who could not see in it, by reason of their own spiritual blindness, a young Samson Agonistes arousing himself from the stupor of despair, breaking in twain the rotting withes of prejudice and error, to stand forth dauntless in resolve to wrestle with adversity and——to conquer!

There were those who, keenly alive to the urgent necessity for remedial measures, burdened with a sense of responsibility for the helpless wards of an indifferent guardian, were, while bewildered and perplexed, earnestly minded to see fair play, bade the young enthusiasts God-speed from their hearts, and cheered them on the untried way.

But among those who stood sneeringly aloof, or only commented to condemn, was Mr. G. Waring Trowbridge.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN BRIDAL ARRAY.

AND the days that saw Olga's fair vision of justice, no longer blind, but with eyes illumined by the spirit of divine truth and pity, stretching out brave helpful hands to a benighted race, shedding light in the dark places, lifting up the lowly and strengthening the weak, gradually take on the form and substance of a glorious reality, saw Rose's nameless child growing in beauty of face and figure until Mrs. Stanhope's adopted daughter was universally pronounced "the prettiest girl in old Adam's county;" saw her winding herself very closely about the heart of the stately woman, whose darkened vision saw no flaw in the child, who flitted about her with that ineradicable suggestion of kittenish irresponsibility that was part of her charm —and her inheritance. Amiable, unreliable, affectionate, weak, there you have Ginia summed up morally; saw the dawning of the day when Robert Maddox was to take her to wife, thereby filling the cup of pride full to overflowing for the haggard-eyed, hollow-chested woman who moved about Olga's cabin on the fateful morning in a very ecstasy of nervousness, which finally found vent in a petition.

Olga was just mounting her pony to go to the schoolhouse, when Rose appeared before her, rubbing a breakfast cup with such nervous energy as to crush it in her tremulous hands, the jagged edge cutting into her flesh unheeded:

"Honey," she said, in a voice as indifferent as she could make it, "would you mind much if I left you for this one night 'lone? I'll get Mandy Simmons to stay in the house with you. I'm all out of sorts these days, and I feel mighty like a little trip would do me a heap er good, seems like I ain't just myself."

"My poor Rose," said Olga, laying her gentle hands on the thin, hard shoulders, "don't you know I would do any thing in the wide world to add to your comfort or happiness? Why didn't you tell me long ago, that a trip would do you good?"

Rose's eyes fell abashed before the pure pity in her innocent dupe's eyes. In all these years of angelic patience and ministration on Olga's part, she had suffered from a vague sense of remorse, which she had easily lulled to sleep by fresh exertions on her own part in behalf of Olga's physical comfort, or her own mental improvement, which she had come to know gave more pleasure than any thing else she could do. But to-day, the day which, it seemed to Rose, had been ordained exclusively for her child's benefit, remorse was quickened by a sense of contrast between what was and what ought to have been, and she could

not stand the serene gaze of those earnest eyes. She mechanically staunched the few drops of blood that had oozed from the hot dry skin of her hand, with the cup-towel, as she answered slowly:

"I ain't thought much about it before to-day."

"And where do you want to go, Rose? New Orleans?"

"I ain't thought much about that either, honey, but if you wouldn't mind, I believe I'll just go over to see Miss Ginia married. That'll be trip enough for me. The folks tell me they're goin' t' have big doin's at the old Hall, and, you know, it will sort of set me up just to see the fine dressin', and the table, and maybe, you know, I might come in handy over to the Hall to-night, about the ladies' dressing-room, you know. That Dumps will have more on her hands than such a poor goose of a girl can manage, anyhow. Niggers is a mighty poor dependence now, any which-a-way. I don't mean to be 'ficious about offerin' my services, but, you know, I worked a whole month at a hair dresser's in Cleveland, and if Miss Ginia ain't got any body to fix her hair, maybe she'll let me do it. I used to be real handy about such things, but my hand's sorter out now, I reckon. But then," with a mirthless, hysterical laugh, "I'm countin' my chickens before they're hatched. I reckon old Miss Stanhope's daughter, that's what the folks calls Miss Ginia, 'll be above lettin' such a shabby old rag-tag as me come

nigh her, let alone fix her purty hair, and her to be married to Dr. Robert Maddox!"

Thus the poor mother-bird, whose heart was all a-flutter with joy and pride and tremulous fear lest any indiscretion that might betray the long-hidden nest from which her radiant nestling sprung should escape her lips, prattled on to lure her unsuspecting listener away from the sacred spot.

"I shan't mind in the least, Rose," said Olga, kindly. "I shall be glad to have you go to the Hall to see the wedding. Make your preparations by the time I get back at twelve o'clock and I will see you off comfortably."

Then Olga rode away to the school-house with a sharp pain at her heart that she could neither reason nor scold herself out of. She thought of the dear old Hall, illuminated to-night and filled with brightness and merriness and warmth in Ginia's honor! She thought of Ginia, safe sheltered in the strong loving arms of a brave good man, with nothing in life to do but to be happy and be loved! She thought of the stately lady of Stanhope Hall giving the charity child into Robert Maddox's keeping with the prestige of her approval set as a seal upon the fair young brow! She thought—and then the pain grew sharpest—of Eustis, doing Virginia honor as his mother's adopted daughter and the bride of his well-beloved friend! And then she thought of a bleak morning in the far away past,

in far away Cleveland, when she had found a little forsaken child crying her frightened heart out at the asylum gate, and had taken her into her own motherly little heart and loved and cherished and championed her through all the forlorn asylum days. Then she took herself to task for the meanness of this retrospection. Was she charging up all the good fortune and brightness and love that had come into Ginia's lot against her? Had not Ginia done quite the nice thing in a sweet little note she had written, begging Olga to come over with Miss Denton to the wedding, adding in a patronizing little "P. S." : "Come because I want you, dear Ollie, and never mind if the blue bloods that are coming to see darling Robert and me made one, should look askance at the brave girl who has dared to dedicate her life to the elevation of a lot of stupid darkeys. I'm not in sympathy with your work myself, dearie, and have given the doctor distinctly to understand that he need not look for me to help him in his cranky plans of redemption, but I do so want you to see my wedding trousseau. Every thing is just lovely. Mamma Stanhope has been the soul of generosity and goodness to me."

And Olga had sent word by Miss Denton that she could not come, but sent enough good wishes to secure her happiness forever, if wishes were all that was needed. No, there was no spark of jealousy in her cogitations, as she rode on toward the task that

suddenly looked so monstrously hard and dull to her. It was simply the cry of a starved heart for something better than the husks that had fallen to her share.

It was late afternoon when the boat Rose had "hailed in" landed her on the Natchez side of the river. Stanhope Hall was fully four miles from the wharf boat. The weather was bleak and uncertain, and the roads heavy with soaking November rains. "You must not attempt to walk out, Rose," was the last thing Olga had said to her and saw to it that she had ample means with her for hack hire.

But Rose, in whose soul deception of any sort was the merest peccadillo, when the exigencies of the occasion called for it, made haste to invest all the money she had about her in a nickel-plated molasses jug which completely satisfied her own limited conceptions of elegance. With this wedding present for Ginia wrapped up in her shawl, she started forward on foot, careless of cold or fatigue, only mindful that she should reach the Hall in time to lay her votive offering before the shrine of her idolatry before it was too late.

"I hope nobody else won't think of a molasses jug," she murmured to herself, taking it from under her shawl and tearing off a corner of the wrappings to peep at it with a glow of pride in the thought that even thus humbly and remotely she was adding her drop to Ginia's already brimming cup of happiness.

But when at early lamp-light Rose found herself alone with the bride (privileged by reason of Miss Denton's recommendation to be her dressing-maid for the solemn ceremonial), her childish pride and joy was submerged in a feeling of tender awe that made her mute in the presence of the child whom she had nourished from her own bosom and whom she had put away from her, long years ago, for its own good. Putting it at the asylum "Where her color wouldn't be against her," she had reasoned within her mother heart when combating the fierce pain of renunciation.

But Rose's own light hue still further mitigated in her daughter's blood left Virginia's physique above suspicion. There was that about the full red lips, the slight flattening of the bridge of the small nose, and the tight crisp waving of the hair which Rose gathered into her hands with such trembling eagerness, that would have caused a shrewd physiognomist to wonder and perhaps to whisper. But the woman who stood behind the chair where Ginia sat before the dressing glass was no physiognomist, and to her the face the glass sent back for her inspection was altogether faultless.

Oh! for the privilege that once was hers of putting her arms about the slender waist and pressing her child close, close, close, to her yearning heart! Oh! for the privilege of drawing the pretty head, so temptingly close to her trembling hands, down upon her bosom to press a mother's fondest blessings on the sweet lips

that would soon belong to another, with all their wealth of unkissed kisses, all their untold power for another's weal! Oh! to be the mother again for one unrebuked moment of perfect bliss! How caressingly her long thin hands lingered about the shining braids, forever shifting them, now higher, now lower, any thing to prolong the blissful time of servitude! While Ginia prattled on (as Ginia must prattle to somebody or any body), from the fullness of her gay young heart. At last Rose could find no excuse for removing another hair-pin. Ginia sprang briskly to her feet, weary of long confinement in one attitude. The soft white mull dress with its trimmings of old lace from Mrs. Stanhope's own hoard, the long tulle veil, and the crowning glory of myrtle leaves and orange-buds lay ready to be donned. Rose stood for an enraptured second with folded hands before her beautiful daughter.

"Miss Ginia," how freighted with wistful tenderness the voice was, "don't you wish your mammy could see you now?"

"Poor mamma, yes. But she's hopelessly blind, you know, Rose, she'll never see a wink again," says Ginia, staring into the hand glass she held in front of her to get the effect of her back hair from the larger one.

"I don't mean ole Miss Stanhope," says Rose huskily, "I mean your own ma. The mother that brought you into the world and nursed you when you was a little baby, and tended you and loved you—"

"And put me into a horrid orphan asylum," Virginia interrupts spitefully. "No, I don't. It is not her fault that I'm not this moment bound out to somebody to make dresses or nurse children. Hush! don't talk about it. I want to forget that I ever was in the asylum, but I can't where there are so many hateful people who know all about it and throw it up to me."

"Me throw any thing up to you, Miss Ginia! Far from me be it, Rose would make you happier than the angels in heaven if she could, my sweety;" then brushing away a furtive tear with one hand, Rose took up the shimmering bridal robe and lifted it carefully over the pretty head and fastened it with clinging fingers about the slim waist, and one by one she laid the finishing touches on with the solemn awe of an officiating priestess, until Virginia's toilet was complete and she stood in bridal array a vision of loveliness that swept away the last remnant of self-control in the untutored soul of the trembling woman before her, leaving only the mother—passionate and longing. Nature would be denied no longer. Rose sank slowly to her knees with folded hands uplifted in petition to her idol of clay: the hunger of a starved heart burned in her haggard eyes:

"One kiss, my child! One kiss for the mother that bore you and that put you in the way of all the good that's come to you this night, and that's kept her love

and her longing out of sight and out of hearing until her heart's like a starved dog gnawin' at her vitals. One kiss, my own beautiful. Nobody'll ever know it. I'm a dyin' woman anyhow, my baby, but whether I dies soon or not I'll never come nigh you again. I ain't foolin' you, my little child, I'm your true mother, my beautiful. I hung the things about your neck that I cut loose for you that day at Miss Denton's, and my heart swelled to think my baby had fell into such good hands, and I swore I'd die before I'd ever stand in your way. And I haven't. I put you from me to give you a white child's chance, and you've had it, my baby. And when mammy made the mistake and told Olga she was mine I wouldn't tell the truth for fear harm might come to you. And when she's tried to act the daughter to me, my head's fell before her, for shame that I was deceivin' such an angel like her, but I couldn't help it. If God sends me to hell for it, I can't help it. I come to grief when I was a girl, because I didn't know no better, and I vowed when I put you in the 'sylum you should have a chance to learn right from wrong. And you've had it, my beautiful. And I don't ask any thing from you but one little kiss. It won't do no harm to give me one little kiss before you gives them all to him, daughter. Let me call you daughter and put these poor longin' arms round your purty waist just once. He's good to my people, and he's goin' to lift 'em up out of the miry clay, but he

shan't never know you're mine. I'd die first. One kiss! Only one, my beautiful!"

With nervous shrinking from what she took for the ravings of one stricken with sudden lunacy, Virginia recoiled from contact with the kneeling figure and gathered her white draperies close about her as she stamped her tiny foot furiously, her bright eyes blazing with anger:

"Get up, Rose! You ugly bad woman to spoil my wedding night with such ravings! Go away from me! Get up and go right out of that door! Your words have no meaning in them! You talk like a crazy woman! What do I know about your child?" But Rose crawled after her on bended knees and caught the floating draperies in her reckless hands. Her haggard eyes were fixed imploringly on the passionate young face above her.

"One kiss, my beautiful! The first and the last ever since I put you from me to give you a white child's chance. I'm a dyin' woman, daughter, but it'll make death easy to think you've gained so much by my givin' of you up. One little kiss is all the pay I ask. I never meant to have opened my mouth, but——"

"Don't dare to say you are my mother. You shan't say it. You—you—I hate you!"

Rose's clutch tightened about her skirts! A gasping gurgling sound issued from the lips that had pleaded to her so vainly. A thin stream of blood

appeared in the open mouth. With a scream of terror Virginia wrenched herself free from her mother's clinging clasp, made one fatal step backward toward the open fire-place where the piled up logs of wood were making merry over this tragedy of a starved heart. Into the blaze her long tulle veil fluttered! Caught and wrapped her about in licking hungry flames with the speed of thought. Out through the door that led to help she sped, maddened by terror, conscious of but one frantic desire—to reach Robert! With piercing distinctness his name rang out over the house, now in the upper halls, now on the grand staircase, now in the lower halls where a few early guests were already assembled, and where Eustis, startled by that piercing cry for Robert! Robert! Robert! fast followed by the flying figure of fire sprang forward and caught the flame-wrapped form into a daring embrace—too late!

There was no wedding at Stanhope Hall that night! Instead, in the nuptial chamber lay a poor charred pain-racked form about which ministering hands hovered unresting and pitiful, while, out yonder in the servants' house lay a woman dying of a hemorrhage, with frightened Dumps sitting by her bed-side. Only Rose! No one knew how it all had happened. Nothing but moans came from poor little Ginia's parched lips. No sound of any sort from those others. Silenced forever were Rose's lips. No more longing, no more deceiving! no more sinning! no more vain pleading!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LETTER DELIVERED

"DEATH must result from the shock to her system. It may be within two or three hours, or it may not be for forty-eight. Her present condition of collapse, or prostration, may be succeeded by delirium, or she may pass away without recognition. I wish we could hold out an atom of hope, but we can not. We have complied with your request to give you the result of our consultation, without reserve and immediately."

This was the horrible verdict that the spokesman for the consulting physicians brought to Robert Maddox, where he stood at the library window gloomily watching the gray light of another dawn steal over a world suddenly made desolate for him. His bright young face was drawn into sudden lines of rigid resolve. Great black rings encircled his eyes, testifying to the intensity of the suffering that had been crowded into the past few hours. As the doctor pronounced poor little Virginia's doom with slow reluctance, a shudder passed through the athletic form of the young man,

and for a moment he buried his face in his hands and yielded to his grief.

"My poor little one! I wish I could bear it for her," he moaned, and then presently went up to take his place by her side, putting from him, as far as he might, all thought of his own loss, so long as there was any thing to do for her.

Delirium did set in!

And what wildly incoherent utterances fell upon the tortured ears of the sorrowing group gathered about her bed! All her cry was for Olga. There was no gleam of recognition for the loving eyes, or the piteous pleadings that Robert poured into her ears, begging her to tell him how it had all happened. In a fevered flow of words she gave them the story that none had a key to. It was of Rose! of Olga! of the asylum! that she prattled unceasingly. Only rarely Robert's name escaped her lips, and then the words he strained his ears so eagerly to catch were strangely incomprehensible and unsatisfying: "Ollie! I want Ollie! Ollie will make her go away! I'm not her child, Ollie, oh! say I'm not that poor crazy woman's child. Take her away! Take her away! There's blood upon her lips. She wants to kiss me! Take her away! Her eyes hurt me! They burn me! Bring Ollie! She loves me!"

And they brought Olga. She did not refuse the summons this time. It was one thing to deny the

happy exultant bride's summons to share in her triumph—another, to stand aloof from the child she had always loved and comforted in times of sorrow and suffering. And kneeling by her bed-side now, Olga tried to soothe the wild delirium of the poor little sufferer by crooning over her the songs she had loved best in the old asylum days. And Ginia knew the beloved voice and heeded it. "Ollie," she said, fixing her great innocent eyes wistfully on the face so close her own, and speaking in an awed whisper, "did you think I knew and wouldn't tell you? Don't tell Robert! He wouldn't love me any more! He wouldn't marry me, you know! She called me daughter! That crazy ugly Rose! Don't let her come back, Ollie! She'll spoil my pretty wedding dress! Maybe if I'd given her that one kiss it wouldn't have happened! Maybe if I'd sent the letter it wouldn't have happened! It's in the blue satchel, Ollie! I meant to send it to you. Don't scold! There, I've torn my apron again and the matron'll scold! Ollie'll mend it. Dear Ollie, how good she always is. The blue satchel, in my top drawer. Eustis gave it to me for my handkerchiefs. How did Eustis get way off here at the asylum? Go away! You're not my mother! You are Miss Denton's Rose! Robert wouldn't love me if he knew! The blue satchel, Ollie! Bring it! It's yours! You're not mad with me, are you? There, my shoe's off and the bell's ringing! Ollie, help me, please, don't let them

scold. Would you have kissed her? Would you have let her spoil your pretty wedding dress? Don't forget the blue satchel, Ollie, it's yours! I didn't mean to keep the letter. I didn't know——Robert! Robert! Robert, save me! The flames consume me!"

It was the same piercing cry that had rung out over the startled air the night before! Once more memory was enacting the horrors of that moment when, a flying figure of flame, she had rushed through the old Hall crying aloud for rescue at the hands of him she loved. Robert caught her in his strong arms and laid his trembling lips upon her closed eyelids. They did not quiver. The lips that had poured forth such a torrent of incomprehensible words, breathed one last fluttering sigh upon his cheek. The breath was as cool as if wafted from the Stygian shores. Virginia was released from suffering! And the house of rejoicing was turned into the house of mourning!

It was toward midnight that Robert Maddox came into the room where Olga and Miss Denton were keeping loving watch and ward over the beautiful sleeper, with a small package in his hand.

"This is yours," he said, putting it into Olga's hand. "There must have been some reason why she wanted you to have it so urgently. My little darling. My murdered bride." He turned toward the shrouded form on the bed and the two women stole out and left him alone with his dead! Olga paused under the hall lamp

to say: "Perhaps Ginia had something to tell me that she wanted no one else to know about. I am going to the library to read it. She spoke of a letter. I want to be alone."

How loud her own words sounded on the hushed air! How distinct every foot-fall on the oil-clothed floor of the hall, whose lofty ceiling sent back echoes that startled her! How big and dark and gloomy the library looked! As she entered it, the clock on the mantle struck one! The tall lamp, that had always stood in that one spot on the center-table, and the care of which had been such a grave responsibility to her in the childish happy days of her Hall life, was dimly burning now. As she turned it up a rustling sound scarcely louder than a mouse scampering behind the wainscoting made her start violently. She sank into a chair close by the table under the lamp. "I'm nothing but a bundle of quivering nerves to-night," she said aloud, thinking to call back her flying courage by the sound of her own voice. The house was as still as a tomb! The lamp made a spot of feeble light in a world of black gloom. Chaos seemed to lie close about its flickering flame. With fingers icy cold from nervousness Olga loosened the knot of blue ribbon that was tied about the pretty satin satchel. Two letters lay inside on the perfumed quilted lining. The one was old and yellow and rumpled! The other fresh and crisp and sweet smelling. On the one was written—"To my little

daughter Olga, to be given to her on her eighteenth birthday," on the other—"To my precious Ollie, from her naughty Virginia—read this one first."

Ginia's wishes were all commands now, so Olga laid the letter that had waited so long for a hearing reverently aside, while she read these apologetic words of Viginia's.

"My darling Ollie. I don't know what you will say or think of me when Miss Denton gives you this together with the letter I've kept you out of so unintentionally. If you had come over to my wedding, as I begged you, I would have put my arms about your neck and have coaxed you to forgive me; as it is, I do beg your pardon, and you must decide whether or not you can grant it after reading this my explanation.

"I must go back to the day when I first saw my Robert, to give it. Little did I think then, that he ever would be my Robert, as he will for very truth in two little days now. Well, I was rummaging in Mamma Stanhope's trunks that day (you would have scolded if you'd been here), and at the bottom of one of them I found your box. I took it for granted that it was jewelry packed away there, and didn't think any harm could come of looking at it. Just as I had got all the contents of your box fairly scattered over the floor (I knew it was your's by the letter lying on the top of all the other things), I heard wheels and knew I would be wanted. I crammed every thing back, as I supposed,

and never opened the box again. Mamma sent it to you by Miss Denton. That was two long years ago, and here, just the other day, mamma sent me to that same trunk to get out one of her colored silk dresses. She said she would honor my wedding by appearing in it, and there—oh! Ollie, don't be too angry with me—when I shook the dress, out of its rumples there fell to the floor a letter! My heart stood still when I picked it up and found that it was your letter! Then I thought you would come over to my wedding and I would put my arms around your neck and kiss you into a good humor. But you would not come. So now I've got to write all this long stupid explanation, which don't look a bit sorry on paper, and when Miss Denton goes back she will take it to you in my pretty little blue satchel that Eustis gave me. I want you to have it, because it smells so sweet, and I remember there was a sweet smelling little d'oyley wrapped about your letter that I can't find any where. I suppose I'll never know how angry I've made you, but I know you'll believe I didn't mean to do wrong. Lovingly your happy, happy, happy Ginia who wants to kiss you."

"Poor little Ginia!" said Olga, wiping away the fast crowding tears, "it is so like her! never meaning to do wrong. Always trusting to the potency of a kiss or a contrite word for pardon!"

The silver bell of the clock smote the air with a single stroke to mark the passage of another half-hour.

The oil in the lamp was almost spent. The flame burned yet more feebly and flickered in a hopeless vacillation between living or dying. Turning it yet a little higher, Olga kneeled by the table to get its fullest benefit and reverently spread open the sheet folded by a mother's hand long years ago. With parted lips and heaving breast she read on and on and on until the last word had burned itself into her memory forever. There were pages of it! Closely, beautifully written. It was a plea for pardon from a mother to her child! It was a prayer from a mother's soul for her child! It was a wail from a breaking heart! Not in that first reading did Olga master the strange story it told. That must come with time and a quieter re-reading. But one blessed revelation illumined the entire sheet. The revelation of unspotted parentage! of untainted blood! She was not Rose's child! She was not a bastard! That was enough! God was merciful! To Him with up-lifted hands and streaming eyes her first burst of gratitude was offered, there where she kneeled in the dimly lit library, with the shadows of night lying thick about her. The pallid lamp-light shed a faint halo about her pure young brow! Her lovely eyes glowed with the light of a great happiness. It was upon this radiant vision that Eustis Stanhope opened his wondering eyes and startled Olga to her feet by a smothered ejaculation. From the dimmest corner of the long room he came toward her now with words of sincere apology:

"Believe me I am innocent," he said; "the unrest and excitement of the past twenty-four hours overcame me when I had only thrown myself on the lounge behind the screen for a few moments' rest. When I opened my eyes and saw you kneeling there with your face radiant with joy and heard your words of fervent gratitude to Heaven I knew some great good had come into your life unexpectedly. Is it not so, child?"

His eyes fell on the open letter under the lamp. With her hands tightly pressed over her heart Olga murmured the one word "Yes."

"And it has come to you in that letter?"

"Yes! I have found a mother and a name! Rejoice with me."

He reached out his hand imploringly toward the letter: "Let me know it too, child! If there is any thing in that letter, Olga, that concerns you, it concerns me too. Will you not tell me what it is? Now, to-night, without making any more mystery of it? If it is any thing that will break down the barriers between us, have you any right to keep it from me? I heard you say 'God has been merciful to me,' tell me that He has been merciful to us both, dear. To me and to you, Olga. Tell me that He has lifted the curse from our love—"

She interrupted him with a sweet gravity in strong contrast to his violent agitation. Her self-control was marvelous.

"God has been merciful to me," she said, and I believe the monstrous mistake that has blotted all brightness out of my life for years past may be explained away—God has been very merciful to me in giving me a mother's stainless memory to revere. It is not clear to me yet. There is much to be done before it can be clear. The barriers are not broken down, my friend, perhaps they are strengthened. If we ever meet on equal ground, Eustis, we will utter our thanksgiving together. But not yet."

"And I am not even to know the contents of that letter?"

"Most certainly not." The pain in his dear face softened the obdurate resolve in her heart, impelling her to add—"at least, not until—" her voice fell to a solemn monotone—

"What? when?" he interrupted eagerly.

"Not until," she said, softly tapping the now folded letter with one little fore-finger, "every word in this letter is proven true beyond the possibility of a doubt. Ah! I have been the victim of so much duplicity; so much of stratagem and cruel deceit has passed muster for the truth with me, that do you wonder I have grown coldly cautious or even skeptical? I believe now I have the clew to that poor woman's humility toward me. Rose, I mean. A humility which I could never overcome, while it pained me to the quick, believing her to be my mother."

"And you found that clew in poor little Virginia's ravings. You think—that—Rose—"

Olga put her hand up to silence him: "Hush! Do not add that thorn to your friend's crown of sorrow. After all it was human nature! Poor Rose. She protected her young, that was all. Perhaps it is well this revelation has come to me when it could do no harm to others. Perhaps God in His mercy removed Virginia before the chalice was held to her lips. He doeth all things well. I would not have had her endure what I have in these latter days, for all the world contains."

"And I—"

"Must wait," she said briefly, but as she passed him on her way to the door, her radiant eyes rested upon him for a second in a glance that held a promise and a benediction both in one.

CHAPTER XXX.

PROVEN BEYOND A DOUBT.

IT was Miss Denton who managed it so that, a few days after Olga and she were once more settled at home in the cabin, Mr. and Mrs. Trowbridge drove up to the fence in their antiquated buggy, and coming in announced in that informal way which is the etiquette of plantation life, that they had come to spend the day.

It was Miss Denton who managed it so that this arrival should befall while Olga was up at the school-house, where she had resumed her duties immediately on coming back from the Hall. The Hall was closed and empty now, Eustis having taken his mother to New Orleans until the shock of Virginia's tragic death should have worn itself away.

It was Miss Denton who managed it so that the picture which had come to Olga in the box left at the asylum, should be placed conspicuously on the table, where it was sure to be handled by the visitors in one of those inevitable pauses in the conversation that come oftenest where topics are few and talkers not in sympathy.

For, however much the true-souled, bright-witted, energetic little old maid might be in sympathy with Mr. G. Waring Trowbridge's gentle, neutral-tinted wife, she was decidedly antagonistic to the handsome blasé man who sauntered into Olga's humble sitting-room on this day with an inward sense of magnanimity not quite explicable even to himself.

It was not Miss Denton, however, who managed it so that Mr. Trowbridge, taking up the ambrotype case with languid intent to kill time, should, after one surprised glance, have laid it down again with audible haste and a violent ejaculation.

"The devil!"

Miss Denton, fixing her keen gray eyes sharply on her nephew, interrupted Mrs. Trowbridge's rather querulous description of household difficulties under the new regime to ask, "What is it, Waring?"

"That picture," he laughed nervously and took it up again. "You remember Nannie? My sister Nannie —of course."

"Yes," said Miss Denton calmly, "of course I remember Nannie, although I never saw her after she was ten years old. You know I was in Europe for some years."

"Your sister, Mr. Trowbridge, that ran away with—who was it?" Mrs. Trowbridge turned curious eyes from one to the other of them. "Waring would never talk to me about her, but some of the old people on the

place have hinted at a Miss Nannie, and when I've asked about her, Waring would always say, she's dead; there's nothing to tell you."

She got up and walked over to look at the disturbing picture. "And you say this looks like her, Waring? Oh, how beautiful, but how intensely sad. Who is this, Miss Denton?"

"It is the picture of Nannie Trowbridge, afterward Mrs. Herman Hartmann," Miss Denton answered in a slowly deliberate voice, as one speaks when guarding against the recognized possibility of being run away with by one's feelings. "She made an unfortunate marriage some years before you came into the family. She was a very beautiful girl, younger than your husband by a few years, and he, being the only man left in the family when his father died, was appointed the legal guardian of his sister's person and property. I think the mistake he fell into was in supposing his guardianship extended to her heart and soul."

"And this picture, you say, looks like her?" Mrs. Trowbridge asked again, looking up absently from the picture in her hand.

"Wonderfully," said Mr. Trowbridge carelessly.

"That picture, is hers," says Miss Denton, with a click in her voice that boded no good to the transgressor she was about to arraign.

"The devil it is! How came you by it?" Mr. Trowbridge asked, in his ugliest manner.

"That's what I've invited you here to-day to tell you," said Miss Denton, looking up at the clock as she added, "It is a few minutes past ten o'clock only, now, and I want to have all the disagreeables of our discussion got out of the way before that poor girl gets back from the school-house. She has had enough to try her nerves latterly without any thing additional being laid on unnecessarily."

"You mean the death of her young friend, Virginia," says Mrs. Trowbridge, pityingly. "That was a shocking affair!"

"Not that exclusively. But I'm not good at circumlocution, Emma. I wanted you to come with Waring because of course what I am about to say will bear fruit in one direction or another and there's no use mystifying you about it. It is evident that you never knew much about Waring's beautiful sister."

"No," says Mrs. Trowbridge, with a little surprised look into her husband's flushed face. "He never liked to talk about her."

"It was not necessary that I should," Mr. Trowbridge said, "considering that she was dead to her family long years before you came into it, Mrs. Trowbridge. But since, for some still unexplained reason, Aunt Denton desires to rake open that old sore, you may as well have my version of the story as hers."

"Certainly, dear," says Mrs. Trowbridge, settling herself into an attitude of respectful attention, while

Miss Denton picked up her knitting and fell to work in grim silence.

"You know that my father and mother died when I was a mere youth, not more than twenty-one, but having reached my majority, I was legally qualified to act as the guardian of the person and property of my sister Nannie, just then seventeen years old. I put her at a boarding school in New Orleans, where she distinguished herself principally by falling in love with her German teacher, a fat greasy fellow with a—"

"The original of the picture there," says Miss Denton, indicating the object of Mr. Trowbridge's unflattering adjectives with one of her long knitting needles.

"She wrote me all about it frankly enough and asked my brotherly benediction on her confounded foolishness. I went down to New Orleans, complained of the rascal to the principal of the school, succeeded in having him kicked out, and told Nannie if I heard any more of such nonsense I should certainly put her in a convent. She stoutly maintained her resolve to marry him, and I told her that she would do it at her peril. That doubtless he was courting her under the impression that she was a rich cotton heiress, but that our property had been left by father so that it was not to be divided until she came of age, which would be four years off. I came home thinking I had left matters all right. A letter from the principal of the school, telling me of Nannie's elopement with her German teacher,

was the next news I got from New Orleans. From that moment she passed out of my life."

"And you never heard of her, or from her again?" said Mrs. Trowbridge, deeply interested in the romantic aspect of the thing.

"No."

"Never, Waring?" Miss Denton asked, searching the dark face before her with truth-loving eyes.

"Well, that is, I did get some rubbishy letters from both of them. Begging ones from her, bullying ones from him. Then the letters stopped coming and I know nothing more. It all happened before the war."

"Then, of course, you would like to hear the sequel to poor Nannie's romance," said Miss Denton, laying down her knitting, putting on her glasses, and drawing from her pocket Olga's letter, "and I am glad I am in position to put an end to the suspense and sorrow you must naturally have experienced at losing sight of your only sister. But, first, a few words of explanation as to how I came into possession of this sequel. When our friend Mrs. Stanhope brought home from Cleveland the two orphan children that have grown up within our knowledge, she brought also, a box that the matron told her had been left at the asylum with the child Olga, with the written request from the child's mother to her, the matron, that the box should not be given to her child until she was grown. I suppose the mother did not take into consideration any chance of

her ever being taken out of the asylum. When I came over to live with Olga, the box was delivered to her. I brought it over; it contained, among other things, that picture, but no word of explanation of any sort, which was a bitter disappointment to poor Olga, who had of course all the cravings of a refined nature to know something definite of her own origin, and the box was comparatively valueless to her lacking any such information. Here just the other day, after poor Virginia's death, this letter came into Olga's hands, and while relieving her of the worst fears that could crush a young girl to the earth, has placed her in a cruel dilemma from which she obstinately refuses to relieve herself, but from which I am resolved to rescue her, let who may smart for it."

Mr. Trowbridge winced perceptibly. It was evident he regarded himself as the possible vent for Miss Denton's righteous indignation. She opened the yellow letter with the most exasperating deliberation:

"I won't have time to read all this to you, and to do my talking too before Olga gets back. This letter is written by your sister Nannie. You shall have it to take home with you, if Olga consents. She tells the story of her pitiful wanderings with a husband imbittered by their failure to secure her inheritance and imbruted by drink. It tells the story of his final miserable end in Cleveland and of her desperate struggles to maintain her child by giving music lessons, for

which she was unfitted by disease. It gives the mournful particulars of her waning strength and of her preparations to have her child taken to the asylum as soon as she passes away. It goes on to tell Olga, that doubtless, by an appeal to law, when she comes of age that she can rescue her inheritance from her uncle, Mr. G. Waring Trowbridge. She does not advise her to this fight, but she tells her that she leaves her in possession of all the facts, so that in case her own judgment, or that of friendly advisers, incline her to a contest she shall be at no loss for the points of the case. She blames herself for not having made efforts in that line for the child's sake, but says that the war which was raging when she died, rendered all legal proceedings impossible. Her directions are very explicit for the guidance of her daughter."

"Well!" says Mr. Trowbridge, stroking his mustache with a nervous hand. "What next?"

"Well," says Miss Denton, "this foolish, obstinate girl refuses to assert her claims, which, of course, you know to be entirely valid, Waring."

"But we will assert them for her, won't we, husband?" says Mrs. Trowbridge, with glowing eyes. "We will take the dear child into our home and hearts, if she will allow us, and make up to her for all that her poor mother suffered so unjustly. She will not need to go to law."

"Slowly, my dear Mrs. T., move slowly," says Mr.

Trowbridge sneeringly. "If my niece sees fit to institute legal proceedings—"

"Which she does not purpose doing." It was Olga's own soft voice that answered him. In their eager discussion of her affairs, no one had heard her enter by the back way and steal into her own room for a second, there to gain full control of herself before facing this fresh trial. "I am so full of rejoicing over the revelations contained in this precious letter," she continued, possessing herself of it as it lay on Miss Denton's lap, "that the wealth of the Indies could make me no richer."

Mr. Trowbridge rose to his most majestic height and held out both hands graciously. "My dear niece, my poor Nannie's child! I am ready to make the amende in any shape you require. Let us bury the past in oblivion."

Olga placed one hand coldly in his. As they stood thus, face to face, Mrs. Trowbridge said, with excited irrelevance,

"That accounts for it."

"What accounts for what, Emma?" Mr. Trowbridge asked, with some natural resentment at this spoiling of a dramatic situation.

"The remarkable likeness between you and Olga that has always puzzled me so. Don't you see it, Miss Denton?"

Mr. Trowbridge's eyes fell before the pure uplifted gaze of his sister's child. It was like facing an accus-

ing angel. Olga took up the discussion to the relief of all.

"I do not propose any immediate change in my mode of life. If I have any claims on you legally, Mr. Trowbridge, they will be satisfied by the grant of such an income as shall relieve me from real poverty. Nothing that has happened recently can in any way affect the self-assumed duties that fill my days."

"But you will live with us, dear," said Mrs. Trowbridge, pleadingly, "you will live with us and learn to call me Aunt Emma, and let me love you as if I'd been the sister to your poor mother that I would certainly have been if I'd only known her?"

"I will call you Aunt Emma and love you, as I've always loved you," Olga said, twining her arms caressingly about Mrs. Trowbridge's neck, "but you must not ask me to give up my work. Because I have found the memory of a mother and a name, is there one iota less darkness and ignorance and helplessness among the poor people for whom I have labored and for whom I will labor so long as life lasts? Because," and here her calm gaze rested on Waring Trowbridge's down-cast eyes, "a great load has been lifted from my heart and soul, must I cease to bear in mind the loads that are not lifted? Oh! no, let me make of my days one prolonged thank offering. It will not be as hard now as it once was. I sometimes think," she added meditatively, "that riches would be a good thing to have, for

then so many projects that now seem chimerical would be simple matters of course. But I would not accept from my uncle's fears what he refused to his sense of justice. This, my more than mother," she said, laying her hand upon Miss Denton's shoulder, as she stood by her chair, "will live with me as before. We are sufficient unto each other. Mine is not a joyous lot, but such as it is I will accept it and will make the best of it."

"It is my wish," said Mr. Trowbridge, lapsing into the dictatorial manner that was constitutional with him, "that my sister's child shall become a member of my own household. I should not be willing for you to continue your present mode of life."

"Your sister's child has passed through the sharpest ordeals of her life unaided, unrecognized, my uncle. The offer you now make her would have been enough to insure her happiness some years ago. It can not affect it in the least now."

And from this defiant attitude no power could move her. Miss Denton was bitterly disappointed that Olga had intruded herself into the discussion before she had frightened Waring into a promise to divide what little was left him in the way of property evenly with his sister's child.

Mr. Trowbridge was alarmed at finding so entirely intractable a relative suddenly evolved from the meek-browed young school-teacher who had been labor-

ing so industriously to "ruin every nigger in the country."

Mrs. Trowbridge was disappointed at the point-blank refusal of her husband's beautiful niece to place herself under their protection, and avail herself of this opportunity to secure a position in society she could never hope to achieve as things were.

Olga alone, spirited, beautiful Olga, was serene and resolute; and away down in her girlish heart a tender hope was springing into life, a fond question was waiting to be answered:

Did he love her well enough to come to her, now that the stain was removed? Did he love her well enough to take her from the lowly cabin she called home, from the work that made her a thing of small account in prejudiced eyes, to place her by his side in the old Hall, where none but stately ladies of long pedigree and bluest blood and spotless records had ever found acceptance? Could she and Eustis meet on even ground at last?

CONCLUSION.

AND after many days there came this letter to the little cabin in the woods. It came in the early spring-time, when the green tassels of the pecan trees fringed the brown twigs with softest verdure; when a glory of pink and white enveloped the peach and apple orchards; when the air was balmy with a thousand perfumes; when the birds sang to each other of mating time and home delights; when all the earth was glad and life was very sweet. It was an answer to her questioning heart.

It came to Olga from Eustis Stanhope, but only a small portion of it was ever yielded up to eyes profane. With a great show of folding down and folding under, this much was submitted to Miss Denton's eyes:

"It is not as if we had parted in a childish reasonless lovers' quarrel. Across the gulf that suddenly yawned between us, we have looked at each other with truth in our eyes and tenderness in our hearts. There may be those, who, if they knew all the burden that has weighed my darling's soul to the ground, would call me craven for quailing from her side when she was personally just what she is now, that I so eagerly sue for the privilege of calling her

my wife. They would contend that in point of beauty, goodness and worth, the niece of Waring Trowbridge is in no respect the superior of old Dora's granddaughter, but you and I, my peerless one, see and think differently. It is not by battering down the barriers with a reckless hand that the great problem of redemption for a race is to be worked out. Side by side on platforms of an even elevation in morals and manners and good achievements let them stand with the highest. Help them to it, sustain them on it. But not by obliterating lines traced by Omniscience itself. Whom God has put asunder, let no man join together.

"That you are dowerless; that you spent your tenderest years as a nameless charity child; that you have devoted your talents and energy to a cause not yet popularized, weigh as nothing in the scales against my longing and my love. I only await your permission to come for you, but I await it impatiently."

But not for long.

Before the pale green tassels of the pecan trees had yielded precedence to sturdy nut cones; before the pink and white clouds of orchard bloom had faded from sight; before the birds that sang of mating time had finished building in the tree-tops, the little cabin in the woods was empty, and over in the old Hall of the Stanhopes there lived and moved a sweet womanly presence beloved of all, its accepted joy and its crown.

Miss Denton went back to live with Robert Maddox, whose organism, mental and moral, were too healthy to allow him to succumb to the first great sorrow of his life. The shadow is not yet lifted, but with heart and hand and head he labors on in the field he has chosen, and his staunchest coadjutors in all good work are Mr. and Mrs. Eustis Stanhope!

THE END.

649

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